THE SOUL OF THE WAR

By PHILIP GIBBS

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THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME

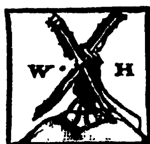
THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME

BY

PHILIP GIBBS

AUTHOR OF
"THE SOUL OF THE WAR"

WITH MAPS



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THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME

INTRODUCTION

THE COMING OF THE NEW ARMIES

In this book I have put together the articles which I have written day by day for more than three months, since that first day of July 1916 when hundreds of thousands of British troops rose out of the ditches held against the enemy for nearly two years of trench warfare, advanced over open country upon the most formidable system of defences ever organized by great armies, and began a series of battles as fierce and bloody as anything the old earth has seen on such a stretch of ground since the beginning of human strife.

Before July 1 I had an idea of writing a book about all that I had seen for nearly eighteen months, since I abandoned the hazardous game of a free-lance in the war-zones of France and Belgium (to me those were the great and wonderful days) and became officially accredited as a correspondent with the British armies in the field. I had seen a good deal in the trenches and behind the lines—nearly all there was to see—of stationary warfare from Ypres to the Somme, and enough to understand with every nerve in my body not only the abomination of this doom which put fine sensitive men into dirty mudholes and sinister ruins, in exile from the comforts and beauty and decency of life, under the continual menace of death or mutilation, but also the valour of great numbers of simple souls who hated it all and yet endured it with a queer gaiety, and laughed even while they cursed its beastliness, and resigned themselves to its worst miseries like Christian martyrs with a taste for beer and the pictures of the "vie

parisienne." I had seen, and suffered from, the boredom of this stationary warfare—an intolerable boredom it is, demoralizing to men whose imaginations demand something brighter and more varied than a glimpse through the sandbags at the same old fringe of broken tree, the same old ruined house, the same old line of chalky trenches, from which death may come at any moment by rifle-grenade, sniper's bullet, or whizz-bang—which is not an exciting form of death giving men the thrill of dramatic moments before they drop. Even in this danger there was no cure for the deadening monotony after the first few days of new experience. It was just another part of the dirty business, and, for men of nerves, a nagging apprehensive thought, varied by moments of cold, horrible fear. Behind the lines, on supply columns, at railheads, in billets, in squalid villages of Flanders and Picardy with their rows of miserable estaminets and evil-smelling farmyards, Boredom, monstrous and abominable, sat like a witch-hag on the shoulders of many men, divorced from the interests of their old home life, from their women-folk, from the reasonable normal routine of peaceful careers. Discipline and duty had taken the place of personal ambitions and the joy of life, and they are cold virtues, very comfortless. Artists, actors, barristers, writers, sportsmen, and men who had found good fun in youth and the wide world, or some corner of it, found themselves as officers on supply columns, R.T.O.'s, D.A.D.O.S.'s, and in other administrative jobs, condemned to a drudgery melancholy in its limitations and apparently interminable. To many of them their area of activity was confined between one squalid village and another, and the chance of a stray shell or of an aeroplane bomb did not really brighten up the scene.

They fought against this desolation of mind valiantly—and it wanted valour—forced themselves to get absorbed in the minute details of their work, sent for the old banjo from home, organized canteens, smoking concerts, boxing matches, cultivated cheeriness as the first law of daily life until it became a second nature, beneath which the first nature only obtruded at night when they went back to sleep in their billets and before sleeping cried out in a kind of agony, "How long is this going on?—this Insanity, this waste of life, this unnatural, damned existence!"

The fighting men had all the danger and, on the whole, were less dull during the long period of stationary warfare. They too cultivated cheerfulness as the first law of daily life, and it was a harder job, yet they succeeded wonderfully in spite of the filthy trenches, the rats and vermin, the ice-cold water in which they waded up to the front line during the long months of a Flemish winter (beginning in October and ending —perhaps—in April), the trench-feet which for a time —until rubbing-drill was adopted—drained the strength of many battalions, and the enemy's shell-fire and mining activities which took a daily toll of life and limbs. Many of them found a gruesome humour in all this, laughed at death as a low comedian, guffawed if they dodged its knock-about tricks by the length of a traverse, and did not go very sick if it laid out their best pal. "You know, sir, it doesn't do to take this war seriously." So said a sergeant to me as we stood in a trench beyond our knees in water. It was a great saying, and I saw the philosophy which had kept men sane. Without laughter, somehow, anyhow, by any old joke, we should have lost the war long ago. The only way to avoid deadly depression was to keep smiling. And so for laughter's sake and to keep normal in abnormal ways of life there was a great unconscious conspiracy of cheerfulness among officers and men, and the most popular man in a platoon was the fellow who could twist a joke out of a dead German, or the subaltern who could lead a patrol into No Man's Land with men chuckling over some whimsical word about his widow, or the comic corporal who could play ragtime tunes on a comb and tissue-paper. Behind the lines there were variety theatres in old warehouses ventilated by shell-holes, packed by muddy men just out of the trenches, who found it difficult to laugh for the first half-hour and then roared with laughter at funny fellows dressed as Mrs. Twankey, or Charlie Chaplin, or the red-nosed comic turn who satirized "brass hats" and the Army Safety Corps and Kaiser Bill, and the effect of a 17-inch shell in the neighbourhood of Private Spoofkins, V.C.

Discipline and hard work helped men to forget the voice that called back to the days of individual liberty and peace. There was always something to do up in the trenches, building up the parapets which in the Salient slipped down after every

rain-storm, wiring, revetting, digging new communication-trenches (under the enemy's machine-gun fire), keeping German heads down by sniping every head that came up, between the stand-to at dusk and dawn. After the relief in the trenches—getting out was the risky job—there was not much rest in the rest camps, what with parades, bombing schools, bayonet drill, machine-gun courses, and practice at the rifle-range. "I'd rather be in the blinkin' trenches again," groused the tired Tommy. "Oh, you'll soon be back again, my lad," said the sergeant. "Yet another week of your bright young life."

It was the youngest men who were most cheerful—young officers especially, just down from the Universities or the Public Schools. Life was beginning for them, and even here in the dirty ditches they found the thrill of life, the splendour of life, the beauty of life. They found it splendid to command men, to win their trust, to "make good" with them. The comradeship with fellow-officers, the responsibility of their rank, the revelation of their own manhood and of their own courage—they had been afraid of failing in pluck—and their professional interest in their jobs as gunners or sappers or bombers, whatever they might be, were great rewards for the dirt and the danger. I saw many of these boys in places where death lay in wait for them, and they had shining eyes and strode along cheerily, talking proudly of some little "stunt" they had done with their men, and not worrying about the menace overhead. It was all "topping" to them, until the strain began to tell. The ideals of the Public Schools, the old traditional ideals of British boyhood—"*Dulce et decorum est* . . ." "Play the game," "*Floreat Etona*," or whatever the old school motto of chivalry and service might be—inspired them and made a little white flame of enthusiasm in their hearts at which their spirit warmed itself when the body was very cold and everything comfortless. One by one many of them were soon picked off by German snipers or laid out by German shells, but others came out, and others, in an endless procession of splendid boyhood, still "to play the game." With them came new battalions of men, whistling and singing along the roads of France.

I saw the first Territorial Divisions come out, and then the

first of the "Kitchener crowd," and gradually, month after month, the building up of the New Army. The Old Army, that little Regular army which fought on the retreat from Mons to the Marne and then upon the Aisne, and then had swung up into Flanders to bar the way to Calais—was gone for ever and was no more than an heroic memory. In the first Battle of Ypres and the second they had done all that human nature could do, and the fields were strewn with their dead until only a pitiful remnant held the lines of that salient against which the enemy had hurled himself in massed attacks supported by tremendous artillery. Battalions had been wiped out, divisions had been cut to pieces. A year ago a battalion commander told me that he was one out of only 150 officers belonging to the original Expeditionary Force still serving in the trenches—and a year is a long time in such a war as this. I met men who had passed unscathed through all of that, but there were not many of them. The regiments remained, but they were filled up with new drafts. The old traditions remained, fostered by the old soldiers here and there, and by officers who know the value of tradition, but they were new men and new armies who were beginning to crowd the roads of France and to straighten the lines of defence. They were the lads who had been called to the colours by the shouts of the street placards: "Your King and Country need you," "What did *you* do, daddy, in the Great War?" (I could not print the outrageous answers I have heard to that little simple question!) and "What will your best girl say if you don't wear khaki?" They had been called by quieter and nobler voices also, speaking to their hearts above the clicking of typewriters in city offices and the whirl of machinery in great workshops and in the silence of the fields where they followed the plough. It was an army of amateurs hastily drilled, hastily trained, knowing very little of the real business of war, but quick to learn and full of pluck. They were led for the most part by temporary officers "for the period of the war only," with a few old "dug-outs" among them and some old non-commissioned officers to stiffen them. The Germans jeered at them—not the enemy in the trenches but the enemy in hostile newspaper offices. "What can this rabble of amateurs do?" they asked. The answer was kept waiting for a little while.

The New Armies were learning. They were bearing the hardships, the cruelties, the brutalities of war, and had to suffer and "stick" them. They were learning the craft of modern warfare in trenches, mine-shafts, and saps, behind field-guns and "heavies," and they had to pay for their lessons by blood and agony. I went to see the New Armies learning their lesson in frightful places. Always the worst place was the Ypres Salient, where the enemy had the advantage of ground and observation, so that he could shoot at our men from three points of the compass and even hit them in the back. The names of all these places in the Salient are a litany of death—Pilkem, Potije, Hooge, Zillebeke, Vlamertinghe, Sanctuary Wood—and Hooge was the concentration-ground of all that was devilish. Dead bodies were heaped there, buried and unburied. Men dug into corruption when they tried to dig a trench. Men sat on dead bodies when they peered through their periscopes. They ate and slept with the stench of death in their nostrils. Below them were the enemy's mine-shafts; beyond them were our own mine-shafts. It was a competition in blowing up the tumbled earth, and men fought like devils with bombs and bayonets over mine-craters which had buried another score or so of men. The story of Hooge was a serial carried on from week to week, but the place was only one of our little schools of war for bright young men.

Always the City of the Salient—the ghost-city of Ypres—stood as a memorial of death, and of that dreadful day in April of 1915 when the enemy first discharged his poison-gas, flung a storm of great shells into the streets and strewed them and the fields around with dead men, dead horses, and dead women. I had been first into Ypres in March, when the beauty of its Cloth Hall and of all its churches and of its quaint old houses was untouched. The Grande Place was full of cheerful English soldiers chaffing the Flemish girls at their booths and stalls, buying picture post cards and souvenirs in the shops, and strolling into the Cloth Hall to stare at the painted frescoes and the richness of its mediæval decorations. I had tea with a party of officers in a bun-shop facing the Cathedral. . . . When I went into Ypres again, a few weeks later, there was a great hole where the bun-shop had been and only litters of stone and brickwork where the soldiers

had bought their picture post cards, and the Grande Place was a desert about the tragic ruins of the great Cloth Hall and Cathedral, which were but skeletons in stone with broken arches, broken pillars, broken walls standing gaunt above great piles of masonry. The Horror had come, when suddenly on the breath of the wind a poisonous cloud stole into the city, and there was a wild stampede of people choking and gasping, terror-stricken, black in the face with the struggle to breathe. British soldiers and Indian soldiers joined the flight of the people of Ypres in a wild turmoil through the streets. Many of them fell and died on the way. A dispatch-rider rode the other way, towards the poison cloud. He had a message to carry to the lines beyond. The gas caught him in the throat and he fell off his motor-cycle and lay dead, while his machine went on until it crashed into a wall. Then the storm of shells burst over the city, flinging down houses, tearing great holes in them, and lighting great bonfires which blazed high, so that from a distance Ypres was one flaming torch. . . . There were people who could not get away, poor women and children who were caught in their cellars. One woman lay ill and could not be moved. An officer of the R.A.M.C. promised to get back to her if he could get an ambulance through the fires and shells. Late in the evening he found her in a field two miles away with a new-born baby by her side. A young French officer stayed with a crowd of wounded all huddled in an underground drain-pipe and tried to bandage them and keep them alive till other help came. For four days they could not move out of the hole, so that it was pestilential. Two little wounded girls lay there among the dead and dying. One of them, with eyes strangely bright, talked continually in a voice preternaturally clear, sharp and metallic, without intonation. She was a Flemish child, but again and again she spoke three words of French: "Moi, morte demain. . . . Moi, morte demain." She died in the arms of the young Frenchman. "I am astonished that I did not go mad," says the young Baron de Rosen, remembering these hours.

In the summer of 1915 I went into Ypres several times, and always the sinister horror of the place put its spell upon me. I spent a night there with a friend—a strange, fantastic night, when shells came whirring overhead,

falling with heavy crashes into the ruins. Beyond, the line of the Salient was outlined by the white light of flares. In abandoned dug-outs were wild cats who spat at me when I peered in. A lonely sentry—poor boy!—had the jim-jams and saw ghosts about; and truly Ypres should be full of ghosts, if they walk o' nights—the ghosts of all the men who have been buried alive here under the fallen masonry, and have been killed here by shells which have dug enormous craters in the roadways. One day two German aeroplanes flung down bombs as I stood in the Grande Place staring at its desolation. I was amazed to know how quickly I found a hole under a wall which I had not seen before. . . . Ypres was never a safe place, and in the minds of many thousands of British soldiers who once passed through its ruins it is etched as one of the ghastly pictures of war.

All through 1915 we had in France not an army of attack but an army of defence. This was not properly realized by the people at home, by our Allies, or by some of our generals. There were demands for attack before we had enough men or enough guns or enough ammunition. It was a tragedy that we had to make several attacks without a real chance of success. Neuve Chapelle was one of them. Loos was another, more formidable and brilliantly carried out as far as Hill 70 by the 15th (Scottish) Division and the 47th (London Territorial) Division, supported on their left by the 9th (Scottish) Division and co-operating with a strong French attack on the right along the Vimy Ridge, but unable to inflict as much damage upon the enemy as we suffered in the assault and the following days when the Guards attacked at Hulluch.

It was the first great bombardment of ours I had seen, though I had seen many small ones since an attack on Wyghtschaete in March of 1915, and was the first time when we showed any real strength in massed artillery, but we did not support the first assault with strong reserves, tactical blunders were made, and the enemy was able to rally after some hours of panic, when their gunners began to move away from Lens and we had a great chance. The disappointment came very quickly upon one's first hopes, but to me the memory of Loos is the revelation of the astounding courage of those men of

the London, the Scottish, and the Guards Divisions who proved the mettle of the New Armies (for even most of the Guards were new men) and went into battle with a high-spirited valour which could not have been surpassed by the old Regulars. The Scots were played on by their pipers. The London men played mouth-organs, dribbled a football—as every one knows—all the way to Loos, and sang " Who's Your Lady Friend ? " amidst the crash of shell-fire.

So now there were other classrooms in the school of war—the Hohenzollern Redoubt, Hulluch, Loos, and other hot spots in that broad, flat, barren, villainous plain pimpled by black slag-heaps—Fosse 8 and Fosse 14 *bis*—which one approached through miles of communication-trenches under the whirring of many shells. I went to these places when the battle was on, and afterwards. Quite a long way away from them there were spots where one hated to linger, and through which one had to pass to get to the battlefields. Noyelles-les-Vermelles was one of them, and I had some nasty hours there when I went for afternoon tea with some officers and found the enemy searching for that house with four-inch shells, which knocked out three gunners in the back yard just as I arrived, and killed some horses as I walked across the field between the bursting crumps—there was a blue sky overhead and fleecy clouds and a golden sunshine—to a hall door where a number of young men were expecting death—disliking it exceedingly, but chatting about trivial things with occasional laughter which did not ring quite true. Vermelles was another of them, and I never went without foreboding into that village of ruins where the French had fought like tigers from garden to garden and house to house before the capture of the château—do you remember how they fought on the ground floor with the Germans above and below them, until the first-floor ceiling gave way and Germans came through and a young French lieutenant swung a marble Venus round his head in the midst of a writhing mob of men clutching at each other's throats ? Shells made smaller dust day by day of all these rubbish-heaps and bigger holes in the standing walls. The smell of poison-gas reeked from the bricks and the litter. Other smells lurked about like obscene spectres. At any moment of the day or night death might come here, and did, without warning. . . . Higher up

one felt safer in the winding ditches leading to the front lines. But it was the ostrich sense of safety. One had only to mount a sandbag and glance over the side of the trench to see how the enemy's "crumps" were flinging up fountains of earth in all directions. They came whining with their high gobbling note overhead. Dead bodies lay about. Up in the front trenches, by Hulluch and the Hohenzollern, men lived always close to mine-shafts which might open the earth beneath them at any moment and bury them or hurl them high. There were bombing fights on the lips of the shell-craters. In some places a few yards only separated British soldiers and German soldiers. They fought with each other in saps. It was another Hooge.

I was only a looker-on and reporter of other men's courage and sacrifice—a miserable game, rather wearing to the nerves and spirit. There were many places to visit along the front, and although they were not places where it is agreeable to pass a few hours for amusement's sake, there was an immense interest in these peep-shows of war where one saw the real thing and the spirit of it all and the ugliness, and the simple heroism of the men there. "Plug Street" was the elementary training school for many of the new divisions, with a touch of Arcadia in its woods in spite of the snipers' bullets which came "zip-zip" through the branches and the brushwood fringes along the outer walks, past which one had to creep warily lest watchful eyes should see one and stop one dead. A fairly safe place "Plug Street" was supposed to be, but men were killed there all right—each time I went I saw a dead body carried down one of the glades—and at Hyde Park Corner, on the edge of it, a colleague of mine was hit in the stomach by the nose of a shell, and here I first heard the voice of "Percy," a high-velocity fellow who kills you before you know he is coming.

Then there was Kemmel and its neighbourhood for an afternoon's adventure any time one liked to be brave or felt inclined to look down into the German trenches from Hill 65, which gave a very fine view of them, up above Kemmel village, strafed into a miserable huddle of ruins and damnably sinister about the deep shell-craters and the overthrown crosses in a wrecked churchyard. I went there one day in a snowstorm,

and coming back out of its desolation—where plucky young men lived with their guns and wondered now and then, at their mess-table in a broken barn, whose number would be written up next—saw a man in full evening dress without an overcoat and with a bowler-hat upon his head, walking in a leisurely way through the snowflakes and past the churchyard with its opened graves. A fantastic figure to meet on a battle-field, but not madder than many things in this mad dream which is war.

Up in the trenches at Neuve Chapelle, beyond the ruins of Croix Barbee, there were bits of open country across which one had to sprint between one trench and another because of German machine-guns trained upon them day and night. I ran across them on Christmas Day to wish good luck to some country boys who were sitting in puddles below the fire-step and chatting with grave irony about peace on earth, good-will to men, and the Christmas stockings—waders, really—which they had hung up outside their dug-outs to see how the trick would work in war-time. It hadn't worked, and they groused against Santa Claus and laughed at this little joke of theirs to hide the sentiment in their hearts.

Festubert and Givenchy, Armentières and Houplines, were other familiar places which one approached through ruins before getting into the ditches where the British Army was learning its lessons. Then as the armies grew the British line was lengthened and we took over from the French, from Hébuterne to Vaux-sur-Somme, and afterwards, in February, when the Germans began their great attack upon Verdun, from the Vimy Ridge to the south of Arras. There was plenty of room here for the new Divisions who were coming out to learn, and plenty of practical object-lessons in the abominable business of war. We learnt a lot of French geography, and dozens of small villages unknown before to history are now famous among British soldiers as places where they lived under daily shell-fire, where they escaped death by the queerest flukes, or where they were hit at last after a thousand escapes.

Sailly-au-Bois was a village on the way to Hébuterne. A charming little place it must have been once, with quaint old cottages and a market square. When I went there first the Germans disliked it, plugged shells into most of the houses

and into one where a number of Sussex gentlemen were sitting down to lunch. It spoilt their meal for them and made a new entrance through the dining-room wall. Beyond the village was the road to Hébuterne. It led through open fields and past a belt of trees less than a thousand yards away, where the Germans lay watching behind their rifle-barrels. But the French had made a friendly little arrangement. If an open car crawled down slowly the Germans did not snipe. If it were a covered car, presumably a General's, or went fast, they had the right to shoot. Queer, though it seemed to work. But I was always glad to get the length of that road and to find some cover in the fortress-village of Hébuterne, with its deep dug-outs, proof against the lighter kind of shells. The Germans had been here first and had dug in with their usual industry. Then the French had turned them out after ferocious fighting—there are many French graves there in the Orchard and in the trenches, and a little altar still kept in good order by British soldiers to Notre-Dame-des-Tranchées; they had gone on digging and strengthening the place, and when our men took over the ground they continued the fortifications, so that it was a model of defensive work. But the Germans shelled it with method, and it was safer below ground than above. In the Orchard young fruit of life fell before it had ripened, and I did not like to linger there among the apple-trees.

The taking over of Arras and its neighbourhood down from the Vimy Ridge to Souchez, Ablain-St.-Nazaire, La Targette, Neuville-St.-Vaast—the very names make me feel cold—liberated a complete French army for the defence of Verdun, and it was our biggest service to France before the battles of the Somme.

I went into Arras and saw the despoiled beauty of this old city of Artois, silent and desolate, in its ruined gardens where white statues lay in the rank grass, except when shells opened great craters in the Grande Place or tore off a gable from one of the Spanish houses in the Petite Place, or came crashing into the wreckage of the railway station or knocked a few more stones out of the immense walls of the Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace, through which I wandered, gazing up long vistas of white ruin. In the suburbs of St.-Laurent and St.-Nicholas the enemy was very close across the garden walls,

and in the Maison Rouge one had to tiptoe and talk in whispers by chinks in the wall (there was a rosewood piano in the front room), through which one could look at the enemy's sandbags a few yards away. Wrinkled old women and wan-faced girls lived still in the deep cellars of the city, coming up for a little sunlight when the air was quiet, and scuttling down again at the scream of a shell. In the dusk small boys roamed the broken streets, searched among the litter of stones for shrapnel-bullets for games of marbles (I once played such a game in a night at Ypres), and cocked a snook at German shells falling a street or two away. Our soldiers became familiar with all these places, strode through them with that curious matter-of-fact way of the British Tommy, who makes himself at home in hell-on-earth as though it were the usual thing, and in Souchez, Neuville-St.-Vaast, Ablain-St.-Nazaire, and on the ridge of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette held the lines in spite of five-point-nines, aerial torpedoes, every kind of high-explosive force which tried to blast them out. For miles the ground was strewn with "duds"—so that one had to pick one's way lest one should kick a fuse—and with the litter of men's clothes and bodies.

The months passed. Spring came, and nightingales sang in the bushes of old French châteaux and the woodpecker laughed in the forest glades; the fields were strewn with flowers, and the beauty of France sang a great song in one's heart. The wheat grew tall and green. And all this time the roads in the British war-zone were becoming more crowded with the traffic of men and horses and guns and lorries—miles of motor-lorries—as new Divisions came out, with belts and harness looking very fresh, making their way slowly forward to the firing-lines to learn their lesson like others who had gone before them. The billeting areas widened, became congested districts from Boulogne to the Somme. In Picardy and Artois there was khaki everywhere. In old market-places of St.-Omer, Bailleul, Béthune, St.-Pol, Hesdin, Fruges, Doullens, our Tommies jostled among the stalls and booths, among the old women and girls and blue-coated "poilus," making friends with them, learning a wonderful lingua franca, settling down into the queer life, which alternated between the trenches and the billets, as though it would last for ever.

The human picture changed. New types of men arrived and some of the old stagers departed. The Indian infantry also went, and the flat fields behind Neuve Chapelle, where the canals cut straight between the rushes, lost those grave, sad-eyed, handsome men who seemed like fairy-book princes to the French peasants, whose language they had learnt to speak with a courtesy, and with soft, simple manners which won the friendship of these people. In the winter trenches the Indians had shivered ; in the dank mists across the flats they had wandered dolefully. They had fought gallantly under officers who sacrificed their own lives with noble devotion, but they hated modern shell-fire and all the misery of trench-warfare in a wet, cold climate and were, I think, glad to go.

The Australians came, and for the first time we saw in France those bronzed, hatchet-faced, handsome fellows who brought a new character of splendid manhood into the medley of British types. The New Zealanders followed with Maoris among them. The Canadians were adding many new battalions to their strength. The South African Scottish sent more kilts swinging down the roads of war. There were Newfoundlanders, West Indians from Barbados. All the Empire was sending her men. For what ?

That was the question which we were all asking. How and when were these men going to be used ? The months were dragging on and there was no great attack. There had been savage fighting on a small scale up in the Salient at St.-Eloi and the Bluff. The Canadians lost ground under a sudden storm of shell-fire which flattened out their trenches, and retook it after bloody counter-attacks. The Vimy Ridge had seen heavy and costly fighting which gained nothing. All along the line there were raids into the enemy's trenches, but it was Red Indian warfare and not the big thing. France, after four months of desperate fighting at Verdun, asked when the English were going to strike. And British soldiers who had been in and out of the trenches, month after month, seeing heavy losses mount up by the usual daily toll, with nothing to show for them, began to despair a little. Was it going on for ever like this ? This existence was intolerable. To sit in a trench and be shelled to death—what was the sense of it ? At the mess-table there were men who found

the world all black, the war a monstrous horror, an outrage to God and life. I had queer conversations with men in dug-outs, in wooden huts under shell-fire, in French châteaux inhabited by British officers, and heard the secrets of men's souls, their protests against the doom that had enchained them, their perplexities, their strivings to find some spiritual meaning in the devilish appearance of things, their revolt against the brutality and senselessness of war, their ironic laughter at the bloody contrast between Christian teaching and Christian practice, their blind gropings for some light in all the darkness and damnation.

Then suddenly all changed. The " Big Push " was to come at last. Trench warfare was to end, and all this great army of ours in France was to get out of its ditches and out into the open and strike. Enormous hope took the place of the doubts and dolefulness that had begun to possess men of melancholy minds. It would be a chance of ending the business. At least we had the strength to deliver a smashing, perhaps a decisive, blow. All our two years of organization and training and building up would be put to the test, and the men were sure of themselves, confident in the new power of our artillery, which was tremendous, without a doubt in the spirit of attack which would inspire all our battalions. They would fight with the will to win.

So we came to July 1, that day so great in hope, in achievement, and in tragedy, and what happened then and for three and a half months of fighting days is told in the articles now printed in this book. I might have rewritten them, polished their style, put in new facts here and there, and written a narrative of history with a more considered judgment than was possible day by day. But I have thought it best to let them stand as they were written at great speed, sometimes in utter exhaustion of body and brain, but always with the emotion that comes from the hot impress of new and tremendous sensations. They may hold some qualities that would be lost if I wrote them with more coldness and criticism of words and phrases. Even the repetition of incidents and impressions have some value, for that is true of modern warfare —a continual repetition of acts and sounds, sights and smells and emotions.

The method of attack has become a formula—the intense preliminary bombardment almost annihilating the enemy's front trenches (but not all his dug-outs), the advance across No Man's Land under the enemy's curtain-fire, the rush over the enemy's broken parapets in the face of machine-gun fire the bombing-out of the dug-outs, the taking of prisoners. One captured "village" destroyed utterly by shell-fire days before the final attack upon its earth-works is exactly like another in its rubbish-heaps of bricks and woodwork. The pictures repeat themselves. Heroic acts—the knocking-out of a machine-gun, the bombing down a section of trench, the rescue of wounded—repeat themselves also through all the battles. In my chronicles these repetitions will be found, and the effect of them on the reader's mind should be the effect in a faint, far-off way of the real truth.

Some people imagine, and some critics have written, that the war correspondents with the armies in France have been "spoon-fed" with documents and facts given to them by General Headquarters, from which they write up their dispatches. They recognize the same incident, told in different style by different correspondents, and say, "Ah, that is how it is done!" They are wrong. All that we get from the General Staff are the brief bulletins of the various army corps, a line or two of hard news about the capture or loss of this or that trench such as appears afterwards in the official communiqués. For all the details of an action we have to rely upon our own efforts in the actual theatre of operations day by day, seeing as much of the battle as it is possible to see (sometimes one can see everything and sometimes nothing but smoke and bursting shells), getting into the swirl and traffic of the battlefields, talking to the walking wounded and the prisoners, the men going in and the men coming out, going to the headquarters of brigades, divisions, and corps for exact information as to the progress of the battle from the generals and officers directing the operations, and getting into touch as soon as possible with the battalions actually engaged. All this is not as easy as it sounds. It is not done without fatigue, and mental as well as physical strain. It takes one into unpleasant places from which one is glad and lucky to get back. But we have full facilities for seeing and knowing the truth of things, and

see more and know more of the whole battle-line than is possible even to Divisional Generals and other officers in high command. For we have a pass enabling us to go to any part of the front at any time and get the facts and points of view from every class and rank, from the trenches to G.H.Q. Because the correspondents sometimes tell the same stories it is because we tell them to each other, not believing in professional rivalry in a war of this greatness. Our only limitations in truth-telling are those of our own vision, skill, and conscience under the discipline of the military censorship. I have no personal quarrel with that censorship—though all censorship is hateful. After many alterations in method and principle it was exercised throughout the battles of the Somme (and for months before that, when there was no conspiracy of silence but only the lack of great events to chronicle) with a really broad-minded policy of allowing the British people to know the facts about their fighting men save those which would give the enemy a chance of spoiling our plans or hurting us. If there had been no censorship at all it would be impossible for an honourable correspondent to tell some things within his knowledge—our exact losses in a certain action, failures at this or that point of the line, tactical blunders which might have been made here or there, the disposition or movement of troops, the positions of batteries and observation-posts.

These are things which the enemy must not know. So I do not think that during the whole of the Somme fighting there was more than a line or two taken out of one or the other of my dispatches, and with the exception of those words they are printed as they were written. They tell the truth. There is not one word, I vow, of conscious falsehood in them. But they do not tell all the truth. I have had to spare the feelings of men and women who have sons and husbands still fighting in France. I have not told all there is to tell about the agonies of this war, nor given in full realism the horrors that are inevitable in such fighting. It is perhaps better not to do so, here and now, although it is a moral cowardice which makes many people shut their eyes to the shambles, comforting their souls with fine phrases about the beauty of sacrifice.

One thing hurt me badly in writing my accounts and hurts

me still. For military reasons I have not been permitted to give the names of all the troops engaged from day to day, but only a few names allowed by our Intelligence. The Germans were counting up our divisions, reckoning how many men we had in reserve, how many were against them in the lines. It was not for us to help them in this arithmetic. But it is hard on the men and on their people. They do not get that immediate fame and honour for their regiments which they have earned by the splendour of their courage and achievements. It is not my fault, for I would give all their names if I could, and tire out my wrist in praising them if it could give them a little spark of pleasure and pride. But, after all, each man who fought on the Somme shares the general honour which belongs to all of them.

The correspondents with the armies in the field do not prophesy or criticize or sit in judgment. That is not within our orders, and belongs to the liberty of writing-men who sit at home with their maps and the official bulletins and our dispatches from the front. "There is not one of these industrious men," writes a critic of our work, "who has had the experience to form a military judgment." Well, that is as may be, though we have had more experience of war than most men will have, I think, for another fifty years. In our own mess we are critics and prophets and judges, and I fancy we could give a point or two to the experts at home, and, with luck, later on, may do so. Now in the war-zone we are but chroniclers of the fighting day by day, trying to get the facts as fully as possible and putting them down as clearly as they appear out of the turmoil of battle. Even now in this Introduction I shall attempt no summing up of the results achieved by these battles of the Somme, except by saying that by enormous sacrifices, by individual courage beyond the normal laws of human nature as I thought I knew them once, by great efficiency in organization and a resolute purpose not checked or weakened by any obstacles, our troops broke through positions which the enemy believed, and had a right to believe, impregnable, carried by assault his first, second, and third systems of trenches, drew in his reserves with many guns and men from Verdun so that the French could counter-attack with brilliant success and inflicted upon the enemy heavy and irreparable loss which

as we hope and believe, though with imperfect knowledge, he cannot afford without weakening his line of defence on our own front and facing our Allies. These hammer-strokes were not decisive in victory. I believe that the German strength of resistance and attack is still great. I do not see a quick ending of this most horrible massacre in the fields of Europe. But it was only the weather which stopped for a time our forward progress when at the end of October the rain-storms made all the battlefield a swamp and obscured the observation which our men had won by three months and a half of uphill fighting and desperate strife. Even then in the mud they took many more prisoners in heavy fighting up by the Stuff and Schwaben Redoubts which the enemy hated us to hold because of their dominating ground to the north of Thiépval—and then in the fog made that great, audacious attack on Beaumont-Hamel, which captured one of the stongest positions against our own front with over 6000 prisoners. Of that last attack I saw nothing, being home on sick-leave.

I must say a word or two about the Tanks. After the first great surprise, the exaltation of spirits caused by these new motor-monsters, there followed a disappointment in the public mind and even among our soldiers. Some of the infantry, poor lads, hoped that at last the enemy's deadly machine-gun fire would be killed by these things and that in future infantry attacks would be a walk-over behind the Tanks. That was hoping too much. It would require thousands of Tanks to do that and we had only a few. But I have the record of what each Tank did in action up to the middle of October, and it leaves no room for doubt that, balancing success with failure, these new machines of war have justified their inventors a hundred-fold. They saved many casualties at certain points of the line and helped to gain many important positions, as at Thiépval and Flers, Courcelette and Martinpuich. If we had enough of them—and it would be a big number—trench warfare would go for ever and machine-gun redoubts would lose their terror.

The battles of the Somme—as we call this fighting, curiously, for on our side it is not very near the Somme—are not yet finished. As I write these words it is only a lull which seems to end them, and does end at least the first phase with which

I deal in the pages that follow. They are pages written on the evenings of battle hastily and sometimes feverishly, after days of intense experience and tiring sensation. Yet there is in them and through them one passionate purpose. It is to reveal to our people and the world the high valour, the self-sacrificing discipline of soul, the supreme endurance of those men of ours who fought and suffered great agonies and died, and if not killed or wounded, came out to rest a little while and fight again, not liking it, you understand—hating it like the hell it is—but doing their duty, with a great and glorious devotion, according to the light that is in them.

I

THE HISTORIC FIRST OF JULY

1

WITH THE BRITISH ARMIES IN THE FIELD, JULY 1, 1916

THE attack which was launched to-day against the German lines on a 20-mile front began well. It is not yet a victory, for victory comes at the end of a battle, and this is only a beginning. But our troops, fighting with very splendid valour, have swept across the enemy's front trenches along a great part of the line of attack, and have captured villages and strongholds which the Germans have long held against us. They are fighting their way forward not easily but doggedly. Many hundreds of the enemy are prisoners in our hands. His dead lie thick in the track of our regiments.

And so, after the first day of battle, we may say: It is, on balance, a good day for England and France. It is a day of promise in this war, in which the blood of brave men is poured out upon the sodden fields of Europe.

For nearly a week now we have been bombarding the enemy's lines from the Yser to the Somme. Those of us who have watched this bombardment knew the meaning of it. We knew that it was the preparation for this attack. All those raids of the week which I have recorded from day to day were but leading to a greater raid when not hundreds of men but hundreds of thousands would leave their trenches and go forward in a great assault.

We had to keep the secret, to close our lips tight, to write vague words lest the enemy should get a hint too soon, and the strain was great upon us and the suspense an ordeal to the nerves, because as the hours went by they drew nearer to the time when great masses of our men, those splendid young men

who have gone marching along the roads of France, would be sent into the open, out of the ditches where they got cover from the German fire.

This secret was foreshadowed by many signs. Travelling along the roads we saw new guns arriving—heavy guns and field-guns, week after week. We were building up a great weight of metal.

Passing them, men raised their eyebrows and smiled grimly. . . . A tide of men flowed in from the ports of France—new men of new divisions. They passed to some part of the front, disappeared for a while, were met again in fields and billets, looking harder, having stories to tell of trench life and raids.

The Army was growing. There was a mass of men here in France, and some day they would be ready, trained enough, hard enough, to strike a big blow.

A week or two ago the whisper passed, "We're going to attack." But no more than that, except behind closed doors of the mess-room. Somehow by the look on men's faces, by their silences and thoughtfulness, one could guess that something was to happen.

There was a thrill in the air, a thrill from the pulse of men who know the meaning of attack. Would it be in June or July? . . . The fields of France were very beautiful this June. There were roses in the gardens of old French châteaux. Poppies put a flame of colour in the fields, close up to the trenches, and there were long stretches of gold across the countryside. A pity that all this should be spoilt by the pest of war.

So some of us thought, but not many soldiers. After the misery of a wet winter and the expectations of the spring they were keen to get out of the trenches again. All their training led up to that. The spirit of the men was for an assault across the open, and they were confident in the new power of our guns. . . .

The guns spoke one morning last week with a louder voice than has yet been heard upon the front, and as they crashed out we knew that it was the signal for the new attack. Their fire increased in intensity, covering raids at many points of the line, until at last all things were ready for the biggest raid.

The scene of the battlefields at night was of terrible beauty. I motored out to it from a town behind the lines, where through their darkened windows French citizens watched the illumination of the sky, throbbing and flashing to distant shell-fire. Behind the lines the villages were asleep, without the twinkle of a lamp in any window. The shadow forms of sentries paced up and down outside the stone archways of old French houses.

Here and there on the roads a lantern waved to and fro, and its rays gleamed upon the long bayonet and steel casque of a French Territorial, and upon the bronzed face of an English soldier, who came forward to stare closely at a piece of paper which allowed a man to go into the fires of hell up there. It was an English voice that gave the first challenge, and then called out "Good night" with a strange and unofficial friendliness as a greeting to men who were going towards the guns.

The fields on the edge of the battle of guns were very peaceful. A faint breeze stirred the tall wheat, above which there floated a milky light transfusing the darkness. The poppy-fields still glowed redly, and there was a glint of gold from long stretches of mustard flower. Beyond, the woods stood black against the sky above little hollows where British soldiers were encamped.

There by the light of candles which gave a rose-colour to the painted canvas, boys were writing letters home before lying down to sleep. Some horsemen were moving down a valley road. Farther off a long column of black lorries passed. It was the food of the guns going forward.

A mile or two more, a challenge or two more, and then a halt by the roadside. It was a road which led straight into the central fires of one great battlefield in a battle-line of 80 miles or more. A small corner of the front, yet in itself a broad and far-stretching panorama of our gunfire on this night of bombardment.

I stood with a few officers in the centre of a crescent sweeping round from Auchonvillers, Thiépval, La Boisselle, and Fricourt to Bray, on the Somme, at the southern end of the curve. Here in this beetroot-field on high ground, we stood watching one of the greatest artillery battles in which British gunners have been engaged. Up to that night the greatest.

The night sky, very calm and moist, with low-lying clouds not stirred by wind, was rent with incessant flashes of light as shells of every calibre burst and scattered. Out of the black ridges and woods in front of us came explosions of white fire, as though the earth had opened and let loose its inner heat. They came up with a burst of intense brilliance, which spread along a hundred yards of ground and then vanished abruptly behind the black curtain of the night. It was the work of high explosives and heavy trench mortars falling in the German lines. Over Thiépval and La Boisselle there were rapid flashes of bursting shrapnel shells, and these points of flame stabbed the sky along the whole battle-front.

From the German lines rockets were rising continually. They rose high and their star-shells remained suspended for half a minute with an intense brightness. While the light lasted it cut out the black outline of the trees and broken roofs, and revealed heavy white smoke-clouds rolling over the enemy's positions.

They were mostly white lights, but at one place red rockets went up. They were signals of distress, perhaps, from German infantry calling to their guns. It was in the zone of these red signals, over towards Ovillers, that our fire for a time was most fierce, so that sheets of flame waved to and fro as though fanned by a furious wind. All the time along the German line red lights ran up and down like little red dancing devils.

I cannot tell what they were, unless they were some other kind of signalling, or the bursting of rifle-grenades. Sometimes for thirty seconds or so the firing ceased, and darkness, very black and velvety, blotted out everything and restored the world to peace. Then suddenly, at one point or another, the earth seemed to open to furnace fires. Down by Bray, southwards, there was one of these violent shocks of light, and then a moment later another by Auchonvillers to the north.

And once again the infernal fires began, flashing, flickering, running along a ridge with a swift tongue of flame, tossing burning feathers above rosy smoke-clouds, concentrating into one bonfire of bursting shells over Fricourt and Thiépval, upon which our batteries always concentrated.

There was one curious phenomenon. It was the silence of all the artillery. By some atmospheric condition of moisture or wind (though the night was calm), or by the configuration of the ground, which made pockets into which the sound fell, there was no great uproar, such as I have heard scores of times in smaller bombardments than this.

It was all muffled. Even our own batteries did not crash out with any startling thunder, though I could hear the rush of big shells, like great birds in flight. Now and then there was a series of loud strokes, an urgent knocking at the doors of night. And now and again there was a dull, heavy thunder-clap, followed by a long rumble, which made me think that mines were being blown farther up the line.

But for the most part it was curiously quiet and low-toned, and somehow this muffled artillery gave one a greater sense of awfulness and of deadly work.

Along all this stretch of the battle-front there was no sign of men. It was all inhuman, the work of impersonal powers, and man himself was in hiding from these great forces of destruction. So I thought, peering through the darkness, over the beetroots and the wheat.

But a little later I heard the steady tramp of many feet and the thud of horses' hoofs walking slowly, and the grinding of wheels in the ruts. Shadow forms came up out of the dark tunnel below the trees, the black figures of mounted officers, followed by a battalion marching with their transport. I could not see the faces of the men, but by the shape of their forms could see that they wore their steel helmets and their fighting kit. They were heavily laden with their packs, but they were marching at a smart, swinging pace, and as they came along were singing cheerily.

They were singing some music-hall tune, with a lilt in it, as they marched towards the lights of all the shells up there in the places of death. Some of them were blowing mouth-organs and others were whistling. I watched them pass—all these tall boys of a North Country regiment, and something of their spirit seemed to come out of the dark mass of their moving bodies and thrill the air. They were going up to those places without faltering, without a backward look and singing—dear, splendid men.

I saw other men on the march, and some of them were whistling the "Marseillaise," though they were English soldiers. Others were gossiping quietly as they walked, and once the light of bursting shells played all down the line of their faces—hard, clean-shaven, bronzed English faces, with the eyes of youth there staring up at the battle-fires and unafraid.

A young officer walking at the head of his platoon called out a cheery good night to me. It was a greeting in the darkness from one of those gallant boys who lead their men out of the trenches without much thought of self in that moment of sacrifice.

In the camps the lights were out and the tents were dark. The soldiers who had been writing letters home had sent their love and gone to sleep. But the shell-fire never ceased all night.

4

A Staff officer had whispered a secret to us at midnight in a little room, when the door was shut and the windows closed. Even then they were words which could be only whispered, and to men of trust.

"The attack will be made this morning at 7.30."

So all had gone well, and there was to be no hitch. The preliminary bombardments had done their work with the enemy's wire and earthworks. All the organization for attack had been done, and the men were ready in their assembly trenches waiting for the words which would hold all their fate.

There was a silence in the room where a dozen officers heard the words—men who were to be lookers-on and who would not have to leave a trench up there on the battlefields when the little hand of a wrist-watch said "It is now."

The great and solemn meaning of next day's dawn made the air seem oppressive, and our hearts beat jumpily for just a moment. There would be no sleep for all those men crowded in the narrow trenches on the north of the Somme. God give them courage in the morning. . . .

The dawn came with a great beauty. There was a pale blue sky flecked with white wisps of cloud. But it was cold and over all the fields there was a floating mist which rose up from the moist earth and lay heavily upon the ridges, so that the horizon was obscured. As soon as light came there was activity

in the place where I was behind the lines. A body of French engineers all blue from casque to puttees, and laden with their field packs, marched along with a steady tramp, their grave, grim faces turned towards the front. British Staff officers came motoring swiftly by and dispatch-riders mounted their motor-cycles and scurried away through the market carts of French peasants to the open roads. French sentries and French soldiers in reserve raised their hand to the salute as our officers passed.

Each man among them guessed that it was England's day, and that the British Army was out for attack. It was the spirit of France saluting their comrades in arms when the oldest "poilu" there raised a wrinkled hand to his helmet and said to an English soldier, "Bonne chance, mon camarade!"

Along the roads towards the battlefields there was no movement of troops. For a few miles there were quiet fields, where cattle grazed and where the wheat grew green and tall in the white mist. The larks were singing high in the first glinting sunshine of the day above the haze. And another kind of bird came soaring overhead.

It was one of our monoplanes, which flew steadily towards the lines, a herald of the battle. In distant hollows there were masses of limber, and artillery horses hobbled in lines.

The battle-line came into view, the long sweep of country stretching southwards to the Somme. Above the lines beyond Bray, looking towards the German trenches, was a great cluster of kite balloons. They were poised very high, held steady by the air-pockets on their ropes, and their baskets, where the artillery observers sat, caught the rays of the sun. I counted seventeen of them, the largest group that has ever been seen along our front; but I could see no enemy balloons opposite them. It seemed that we had more eyes than they, but to-day theirs have been staring out of the veil of the mist.

5

We went farther forward to the guns, and stood on the same high field where we had watched the night bombardment. The panorama of battle was spread around us, and the noise of battle swept about us in great tornadoes. I have said that in the night one was startled by the curious quietude of the

guns, by that queer muffled effect of so great an artillery. But now on the morning battle this phenomenon, which I do not understand, no longer existed. There was one continual roar of guns, which beat the air with great waves and shocks of sound, prodigious and overwhelming.

The full power of our artillery was let loose at about 6 o'clock this morning. Nothing like it has even been seen or heard upon our front before, and all the preliminary bombardment, great as it was, seemed insignificant to this. I do not know how many batteries we have along this battle-line or upon the section of the line which I could see, but the guns seemed crowded in vast numbers of every calibre, and the concentration of their fire was terrific in its intensity.

For a time I could see nothing through the low-lying mist and heavy smoke-clouds which mingled with the mist, and stood like a blind man, only listening. It was a wonderful thing which came to my ears. Shells were rushing through the air as though all the trains in the world had leapt their rails and were driving at express speed through endless tunnels in which they met each other with frightful collisions.

Some of these shells, firing from batteries not far from where I stood, ripped the sky with a high tearing note. Other shells whistled with that strange, gobbling, sibilant cry which makes one's bowels turn cold. Through the mist and the smoke there came sharp, loud, insistent knocks, as separate batteries fired salvos, and great clangorous strokes, as of iron doors banged suddenly, and the tattoo of the light field-guns playing the drums of death.

The mist was shifting and dissolving. The tall tower of Albert Cathedral appeared suddenly through the veil, and the sun shone full for a few seconds on the golden Virgin and the Babe, which she held head downwards above all this tumult as a peace-offering to men. The broken roofs of the town gleamed white, and the two tall chimneys to the left stood black and sharp against the pale blue of the sky, into which dirty smoke drifted above the whiter clouds.

I could see now as well as hear. I could see our shells falling upon the German lines by Thiépval and La Boisselle and farther by Mametz, and southwards over Fricourt. High explosives were tossing up great vomits of black smoke and earth all along the ridges. Shrapnel was pouring upon these

places, and leaving curly white clouds, which clung to the ground.

Below there was the flash of many batteries like Morse code signals by stabs of flame. The enemy was being blasted by a hurricane of fire. I found it in my heart to pity the poor devils who were there, and yet was filled by a strange and awful exultation because this was the work of our guns, and because it was England's day.

Over my head came a flight of six aeroplanes, led by a single monoplane, which steered steadily towards the enemy. The sky was deeply blue above them, and when the sun caught their wings they were as beautiful and delicate as butterflies. But they were carrying death with them, and were out to bomb the enemy's batteries and to drop their explosives into masses of men behind the German lines.

Farther away a German plane was up. Our anti-aircraft guns were searching for him with their shells, which dotted the sky with snowballs.

Every five minutes or so a single gun fired a round. It spoke with a voice I knew, the deep, gruff voice of old "Grandmother," one of our 15-inch guns, which carries a shell large enough te smash a cathedral with one enormous burst. I could follow the journey of the shell by listening to its rush through space. Seconds later there was the distant thud of its explosion.

Troops were moving forward to the attack from behind the lines. It was nearly 7.30. All the officers about me kept glancing at their wrist-watches. We did not speak much then, but stared silently at the smoke and mist which floated and banked along our lines. There, hidden, were our men. They, too, would be looking at their wrist-watches.

The minutes were passing very quickly—as quickly as men's lives pass when they look back upon the years. An officer near me turned away, and there was a look of sharp pain in his eyes. We were only lookers-on. The other men, our friends, the splendid Youth that we have passed on the roads of France, were about to do this job. Good luck go with them! Men were muttering such wishes in their hearts.

6

It was 7.30. Our watches told us that, but nothing else. The guns had lifted and were firing behind the enemy's first lines, but there was no sudden hush for the moment of attack. The barrage by our guns seemed as great as the first bombardment. For ten minutes or so before this time a new sound had come into the general thunder of artillery. It was like the "rafale" of the French soixante-quinze, very rapid, with distant and separate strokes, but louder than the noise of field-guns. They were our trench-mortars at work along the whole length of the line before me.

It was 7.30. The moment for the attack had come. Clouds of smoke had been liberated to form a screen for the infantry, and hid the whole line. The only men I could see were those in reserve, winding along a road by some trees which led up to the attacking points. They had their backs turned as they marched very slowly and steadily forward. I could not tell who they were, though I had passed some of them on the road a day or two before. But, whoever they were, English, Irish, or Welsh, I watched them until most had disappeared from sight behind a clump of trees. In a little while they would be fighting, and would need all their courage.

At a minute after 7.30 there came through the rolling smoke-clouds a rushing sound. It was the noise of rifle-fire and machine-guns. The men were out of their trenches and the attack had begun. The enemy was barraging our lines.

7

The country chosen for our main attack to-day stretches from the Somme for some 20 miles northwards. The French were to operate on our immediate right. It is very different country from Flanders, with its swamps and flats, and from the Loos battlefields, with their dreary plain pimpled by slack-heaps.

It is a sweet and pleasant country, with wooded hills and little valleys along the river-beds of the Ancre and the Somme, and fertile meadow-lands and stretches of woodland, where soldiers and guns may get good cover. "A clean country," said one of our Generals when he first went to it from the northern war zone.

It seemed very queer to go there first, after a knowledge of war in the Ypres salient, where there is seldom view of the enemy's lines from any rising ground—except Kemmel Hill and Observatory Ridge—and where certainly one cannot walk on the skyline in full view of German earthworks 2000 yards away.

But at Hebuterne, which the French captured after desperate fighting, and at Auchonvillers (opposite Beaumont), and on the high ground by the ruined city of Albert, looking over to Fricourt and Mametz, and farther south on the Somme, looking towards the little German stronghold at Curlu, beyond the marshes, one could see very clearly and with a strange, unreal sense of safety.

I saw a German sentry pacing the village street of Curlu, and went within 20 paces of his outposts. Occasionally one could stare through one's glasses at German working parties just beyond sniping range round Beaumont and Fricourt, and to the left of Fricourt the Crucifix between its seven trees seemed very near as one looked at it in the German lines.

Below this Calvary was the Tambour and the Bois Français, where not a week passed without a mine being blown on one side or the other, so that the ground was a great upheaval of mingling mine-craters and tumbled earth, which but half covered the dead bodies of men.

It was difficult ground in front of us. The enemy was strong in his defences. In the clumps of woodland beside the ruined villages he hid many machine-guns and trench-mortars, and each ruined house in each village was part of a fortified stronghold difficult to capture by direct assult. It was here, however, and with good hopes of success that our men attacked to-day, working eastwards across the Ancre and northwards up from the Somme.

8

At the end of this day's fighting it is still too soon to give a clear narrative of the battle. Behind the veil of smoke which hides our men there were many different actions taking place, and the messages that come back at the peril of men's lives and by the great gallantry of our signallers and runners give but glimpses of the progress of our men and of their hard fighting.

I have seen the wounded who have come out of the battle, and the prisoners brought down in batches, but even they can give only confused accounts of fighting in some single sector of the line which comes within their own experience.

At first, it is certain, there was not much difficulty in taking the enemy's first line trenches along the greater part of the country attacked. Our bombardment had done great damage, and had smashed down the enemy's wire and flattened his parapets. When our men left their assembly trenches and swept forward, cheering, they encountered no great resistance from German soldiers, who had been in hiding in their dug-outs under our storm of shells.

Many of these dug-outs were blown in and filled with dead, but out of others which had not been flung to pieces by high explosives crept dazed and deafened men who held their hands up and bowed their heads. Some of them in one part of the line came out of their shelters as soon as our guns lifted, and met our soldiers half-way with signs of surrender.

They were collected and sent back under guard, while the attacking columns passed on to the second and third lines in the network of trenches, and then if they could get through them to the fortified ruins behind.

But the fortunes of war vary in different places, as I know from the advance of troops, including the South Staffords, the Manchesters, and the Gordons. In crossing the first line of trench the South Staffordshire men had a comparatively easy time, with hardly any casualties, gathering up Germans who surrendered easily. The enemy's artillery fire did not touch them seriously, and both they and the Manchesters had very great luck.

But the Gordons fared differently. These keen fighting men rushed forward with great enthusiasm until they reached one end of the village of Mametz, and then quite suddenly they were faced by rapid machine-gun fire and a storm of bombs. The Germans held a trench called Danzig Avenue on the ridge where Mametz stands, and defended it with desperate courage. The Gordons flung themselves upon this position, and had some difficulty in clearing it of the enemy. At the end of the day Mametz remained in our hands.

It was these fortified villages which gave our men greatest trouble, for the German troops defended them with real courage,

and worked their machine-guns from hidden emplacements with skill and determination.

Fricourt is, I believe, still holding out (its capture has since been officially reported), though our men have forced their way on both sides of it, so that it is partly surrounded. Montauban, to the north-east of Mametz, was captured early in the day, and we also gained the strong point at Serre, until the Germans made a somewhat heavy counter-attack, and succeeded in driving out our troops.

Beaumont-Hamel was not in our hands at the end of the day, but here again our men are fighting on both sides of it. The woods and village of Thiépval, which I had watched under terrific shell-fire in our preliminary bombardments, was one point of our first attack, and our troops swept from one end of the village to the other, and out beyond to a new objective.

They were too quick to get on, it seems, for a considerable number of Germans remained in the dug-outs, and when the British soldiers went past them they came out of their hiding-places and became a fighting force again. Farther north our infantry attacked both sides of the Gommecourt salient with the greatest possible valour.

That is my latest knowledge, writing at midnight on the first day of July, which leaves our men beyond the German front lines in many places, and penetrating to the country behind like arrow-heads between the enemy's strongholds.

9

In the afternoon I saw the first batchs of prisoners brought in. In parties of 50 to 100 they came down, guarded by men of the Border Regiment, through the little French hamlets close behind the fighting-lines, where peasants stood in their doorways watching these firstfruits of victory.

They were damaged fruit, some of these poor wretches, wounded and nerve-shaken in the great bombardment. Most of them belonged to the 109th and 110th Regiments of the 14th Reserve Corps, and they seemed to be a mixed lot of Prussians and Bavarians. On the whole, they were tall, strong fellows, and there were striking faces among them, of men higher than the peasant type, and thoughtful. But they were very haggard and worn and dirty.

Over the barbed wire which had been stretched across a farmyard, in the shadow of an old French church, I spoke to some of them. To one man especially, who answered all my questions with a kind of patient sadness. He told me that most of his comrades and himself had been without food and water for several days, as our intense fire made it impossible to get supplies up the communication-trenches.

About the bombardment he raised his hands and eyes a moment—eyes full of a remembered horror—and said, "Es war schrecklich" (It was horrible). Most of the officers had remained in the second line, but the others had been killed, he thought. His own brother had been killed, and in Baden his mother and sisters would weep when they heard. But he was glad to be a prisoner, out of the war at last, which would last much longer.

A new column of prisoners was being brought down, and suddenly the man turned and uttered an exclamation with a look of surprise and awe.

"Ach, da ist ein Hauptmann!" He recognized an officer among these new prisoners, and it seemed clearly a surprising thing to him that one of the great caste should be in this plight, should suffer as he had suffered.

Some of his fellow-prisoners lay on the ground all bloody and bandaged. One of them seemed about to die. But the English soldiers gave them water, and one of our officers emptied his cigarette-case and gave them all he had to smoke.

Other men were coming back from the fields of fire, glad also to be back behind the line. They were our wounded, who came in very quickly after the first attack to the casualty clearing stations close to the lines, but beyond the reach of shell-fire. Many of them were lightly wounded in the hands and feet, and sometimes 50 or more were on one lorry, which had taken up ammunition and was now bringing back the casualties.

They were wonderful men. So wonderful in their gaiety and courage that one's heart melted at the sight of them. They were all grinning as though they had come from a "jolly" in which they had been bumped a little. There was a look of pride in their eyes as they came driving down like wounded knights from a tourney.

They had gone through the job with honour, and have come

out with their lives, and the world was good and beautiful again, in this warm sun, in these snug French villages, where peasant men and women waved hands to them, and in these fields of scarlet and gold and green.

The men who were going up to the battle grinned back at those who were coming out. One could not see the faces of the lying-down cases, only the soles of their boots as they passed; but the laughing men on the lorries—some of them stripped to the waist and bandaged roughly—seemed to rob war of some of its horror, and the spirit of our British soldiers shows bright along the roads of France, so that the very sun seems to get some of its gold from these men's hearts.

To-night the guns are at work again, and the sky flushes as the shells burst over there where our men are fighting.

II

THE FIRST CHARGE

1

July 2

It is possible now to get something like a clear idea of the fighting which began yesterday morning at 7.30, when the furious tempest of our guns passed farther over the German lines and our infantry left their trenches for the great adventure.

The battle goes on, with success to our arms. Fricourt, partly surrounded yesterday (by the 21st Division), was taken by assault to-day, and a German counter-attack upon Montauban was repulsed with losses that tore gaps into the enemy's ranks. Prisoners come tramping down in batches, weary, worn men, who have the gallantry to praise our own infantry and remember with a shudder the violence of our gunfire.

Wounded men who are coming out of the fighting-lines ask one question, "How are we doing?" Men suffering great pain have a smile in their eyes when the answer comes, "We are doing well." The spirit of our men is so high that it is certain we shall gain further ground, however great the cost.

The ground we have already gained was won by men who fought to win, and who went "all out," as they say, with a fierce enthusiasm to carry their objective, quickly and utterly and cleanly. This wonderful spirit of the men is praised by all their officers as a kind of new revelation, though they saw them in trench life and in hard times.

"They went across toppingly," said a wounded boy of the West Yorkshires, who was in the first attack on Fricourt. "The fellows were glorious," said another young officer who could hardly speak for the pain in his left shoulder, where a piece of shell struck him down in Mametz Wood. "Wonderful chaps!" said a lieutenant of the Manchesters. "They went cheering

through machine-gun fire as though it were just the splashing of rain. . . . They beat everything for real pluck."

They beat everything for pluck except their own officers, who, as usual, led their men forward without a thought of their own risks.

2

The attack on Montauban was one of our best successes yesterday. The men were mainly Lancashire troops (of the Manchester Regiment) supported by men of the Home Counties, including those of Surrey, Kent, Essex, Bedford, and Norfolk. They advanced in splendid order straight for their objective, swept over the German trenches, and captured large numbers of prisoners, without great loss to themselves.

Their commanding officers were anxious about a German strong point called the Briqueterie, or brickfield, which had been full of machine-guns and minenwerfers, and the original intention was to pass this without a direct attempt to take it.

But the position was found to be utterly destroyed by our bombardment, and a party of men (the Liverpools) were detached to seize it, which they did with comparative ease. The remainder of the men in those battalions went on to the ruined village of Montauban and, in spite of spasmodic machine-gun fire from some of the broken houses, carried it in one great flood of invasion.

Large numbers of Germans were taking cover in dug-outs and cellars, but as soon as our men entered they came up into the open and surrendered. Many of them were so cowed by the great bombardment they had suffered and by the waves of men that swept into their stronghold that they fell upon their knees and begged most piteously for mercy, which was granted to them.

The loss of Mantauban was serious to the enemy, and they prepared a counter-attack, which was launched this morning, at 3 o'clock, at a strength of two regiments. Our men were expecting this and had organized their defence. The Germans came on in close order, very bravely, rank after rank advancing over the dead and wounded bodies of their comrades, who were caught by our machine-gun fire and rifle-fire and mown down. Only a few men were able to enter our trenches, and these died.

Mantauban remains in our hands, and so far the enemy has not attempted another attack.

3

Our line winds round the village in a sharp salient which drops south-eastwards to Mametz, which is full of German dead and wounded, who are being found in the cellars and taken back to our hospitals. It was in the taking of Mametz that some of the Gordons suffered heavily. With English troops they advanced across the open with sloped arms. There was very little shell-fire and not a rifle-shot came from the enemy's broken trenches.

"Suddenly," says one of their officers, "a machine-gun opened fire upon us point-blank, and caught us in the face. I shouted to my men to advance at the double, and we ran forward through a perfect stream of shattering bullets. Many of my poor boys dropped, and then I fell and knew nothing more for a while. But afterwards I heard that we had taken Mametz, and hold it still. . . . My Gordons were fine, but we had bad luck."

It was the fire of German machine-guns which was most trying to our men. Again and again soldiers have told me to-day that the hard time came when these bullets began to play upon them. In spite of our enormous bombardment there remained here and there, even in a front-line trench, a machine-gun emplacement so strongly built with steel girders and concrete cover that it had defied our high explosives. And inside were men who were defiant also.

A young officer of the Northumberland Fusiliers paid a high tribute to them. "They are wonderful men," he said, "and work their machines until they are bombed to death. In the trenches by Fricourt they stayed on when all the other men had either been killed or wounded, and would neither surrender nor escape. It was the same at Loos, and it would not be sporting of us if we did not say so, though they have knocked out so many of our best."

The same opinion in almost the same words was given to me to-day by many men whose bodies bore witness to these German Maxims, and though their words were a tribute to the enemy, they also proved the fine generosity in the heart of our own men.

While the attacks were being made on Montauban and Mametz

very hard fighting was in progress on the left, or western, side of our line from Gommecourt downwards. So far I have heard very little of the action at Gommecourt, where the German salient was most difficult to assault owing to formidable defences. In that direction our progress has not been great.

Farther south at Ovillers and La Boisselle our attacks were rather more fortunate, and some ground was gained with great loss in life to the enemy, though not without many casualties to ourselves. Fortunately, as in all this fighting, the proportion of lightly wounded men is wonderfully high.

The advance upon the ridge of La Boisselle was a splendid and memorable thing. The men who took part in it were hard, tough fellows who fear neither man nor devil, nor engines of war. They went forward cheering, and the Tyneside pipers played on their men. The German guns were flinging Jack Johnsons over, but they did not inflict much damage, and the men jeered at them.

"Silly old five-point-nine crumps!" said a young officer to-day who had been among them. "They only made a beastly stink and the devil of a noise. It was the machine-guns which did all the work."

The machine-guns were enfilading our men from La Boisselle, and from the high ground above their bullets came pattering down in showers, so that when they hit men in the shoulder they came out at the wrist. They swept No Man's Land like a scythe.

But our troops passed on steadily with fixed bayonets at parade step, not turning their heads when comrades dropped to right and left of them. They took the first line of German trenches, which were blown to dust-heaps with the bodies of the men who had held them. In the second line there were men still living, and still resolute enough to defend themselves. They were bombed out of this position, and our men went on to the third line still under machine-gun fire.

"It seemed to me," said a Lincolnshire lad, "as if there was a machine-gun to every five men." Without exaggeration there were many of these machines and they were served skilfully and terribly by their gunners. Beyond La Boisselle, which was pressed on one side, the fire became very intense. High explosives, shrapnel, and trench-mortars ploughed up the ground.

"They threw everything at us except half-crowns," said a man of the Royal Scots.

It was the Royal Scots who charged with the bayonet into a body of German troops, and the other battalions advanced at the double and captured batches of men who had no more stomach for the fight.

Some of the hardest fighting at La Boisselle was done by men of Dorset and Manchester, with Highland Light Infantry and Borderers. They had an easy time over the front line, but when the second was reached had to engage in a battle of bombs with a large body of Germans. This resistance was broken down and when there was a show of bayonets the enemy surrendered. They were haggard men, who had suffered, like most of our prisoners, from long hunger and thirst as our bombardment had cut off their supplies and broken the water-pipes.

Farther north there was a severe struggle for the possession of Thiépval, which was once in our hands but is now again in the enemy's grip. It is clear from all the evidence I can get that our men passed beyond to a further objective without staying to clear out the dug-outs where Germans were in hiding or to search for all the machine-gun emplacements. The enemy came out of their hiding-places and served their machine-guns upon the British troops who had gone forward.

A sergeant-major of the Manchesters, who took part in one of the attacks which followed each other in waves upon the Thiépval positions, says that he and his comrades forced their way across the front trenches and had to walk over the bodies of large numbers of German dead, who had fallen in the bombardment. With his regiment he went forward into a wood known to the men as "Blighty," and then fell wounded.

Machine-gun bullets and shrapnel were slashing through it with a storm of lead, lopping off branches and ricochetting from the tree-trunks. The men stood this ordeal superbly, and those who were not wounded fought their way through towards the village. Some battalions working on the left of Thiépval had a very severe ordeal. One of them, wounded, told me that they seized the first system of trenches in the face of machine-gun fire and captured the men who remained alive in the dug-outs.

They were deep dug-outs, going 30 feet below ground, and in

some cases, even at that depth, had trap-doors leading to still lower chambers, so that our bombardment had not touched them. Many of them were elaborately fitted and furnished, and were well stocked with wine and beer. A great deal of correspondence was found and sent back to our lines in sandbags.

It was when our men advanced upon the Thiépval woods that they had their hardest hours, for the enemy's fire was heavy, and they had to pass through an intense barrage. Meanwhile big fighting was in progress at Fricourt, and some of the North-countrymen had a great ordeal of fire. They have done magnificently, and Fricourt is ours.

Other troops were engaged, for masses of men of many British regiments advanced on both sides of the village endeavouring to get possession of Shelter Wood, Lozenge Wood, and the high ground to the north of the village from the position known as the Crucifix. Large numbers of Germans were killed and wounded, but the garrison of Fricourt maintained a very stout resistance, and until this morning our attacks did not succeed in taking this stronghold, although it was nearly surrounded.

Heroic acts were done by our men, as I know from the comrades who were with them. One boy of eighteen, to give only one instance, was so good a captain, although a private soldier, that when the officers of his platoon had fallen he rallied the men and led them forward. "Come on, my lads," he cried. "We'll get them out!" A pipe-major of the Royal Scots led this battalion forward to an old Scottish tune, and during the attack stood out alone in No Man's Land playing still until he fell wounded.

Early this morning a very fine flanking attack was made on Fricourt by the men who had held on to the ground during the night, and Crucifix Trench was taken after the explosion of two big mines. The attack then closed in, one body of troops working round to the north and another fighting their way round the south side in order to get the village within a pair of tongs.

The operation succeeded and the village was taken, but fighting still went on to gain possession of the high ridge above.

A whole company of German soldiers were seen to come suddenly across the open with their hands up. Other men straggled singly over the shell-beaten ground to surrender to our men.

But the enemy's guns put up a heavy barrage of shrapnel and high explosives when our men tried to advance along the ridge, and from the upper end of the Fricourt Wood there came the incessant clatter of machine-gun fire. Our attack did not falter, and as far as I can learn the position to-night is good.

Here, then, are some scraps of fact about a great battle still in progress and covering a wide stretch of ground, in which many separate actions are taking place. It is impossible for an eye-witness to see more than a corner of these battlefields, and at this hour for one man to write a clear, straight chronicle of so great an adventure. I have been travelling to-day about the lines, trying to gather the threads together, talking to many of our fighting men, going among the wounded and the prisoners, and in the intense and immediate interest of this great drama of war which is all about me, trying to get at the latest facts of our progress from hour to hour.

But what I have written is only the odds and ends of a long heroic story which must be written later with fuller knowledge of men and deeds. Only one thing is really very clear and shining in all this turmoil of two days of battle—it is the unconquerable spirit of our men.

III

THE FIELD OF HONOUR

I

JULY 3

As the hours pass we are gaining new ground and extending our line slowly but steadily to straighten it out between the German strongholds which have been captured by the great gallantry of our men after heavy fighting.

To-day when I went into the heart of these battlefields in and around Fricourt, where we have made our most successful advance, I could see the progress we have made since the first day's attacks by the elevation of the shell-fire, which traced out the German and British lines. To the right of me was Mametz, held by our troops and our encircling loop no longer dipped so steeply southwards as before, but curved gradually westwards bleow the Bois de Mametz until it reached Fricourt itself.

Here we are not only in possession of the village but have the wood on the high ground beyond, the Crucifix Trench on the edge to the left, and Lozenge Wood still farther to the left. Our line then runs to La Boisselle, most of which was in our hands early this morning after a fierce bombardment by our guns, followed by the infantry advance. It seemed to me, from my own observation to-day, that the German guns are retiring farther back to escape capture or direct hits, for many of their shrapnel shells appeared to come from an extreme range by high angle fire. All this shows that we are pressing the enemy hard, and that so far he is unable to bring up supports to secure his defence.

The scene here was wonderful, and though I have been in many battlefields since this war began I have never watched before such a complete and close picture of war in its infernal

grandeur. The wood of La Boisselle was to my left on the rising slopes, up which there wound a white road to that ragged fringe of broken tree-trunks, standing like gallows-trees against the sky-line.

Immediately facing me was Lozenge Wood and the Crucifix, with two separate trees known as the Poodles, and just across the way to my right in the hollow that dips below the wood was Fricourt. Montauban, which our troops took by assault in the first day's fighting, was marked only by one tall chimney, the rest of its ruins being hidden behind a crest of ground, but to the right, near enough for me to see and count its ruined houses, was Mametz, lying in a cup below the ridge.

A great bombardment was raging from both sides, the enemy shelling the places we had taken from him, and our guns putting a heavy barrage on to his positions. La Boisselle was being shelled by shrapnel with great severity, and there was one spot at the northern end of the tree stumps where British and German shells seemed to meet and mingle their explosions.

In what was once a village there were dense clouds of smoke which rose up in columns and then spread out into a thick pall. In the very centre of this place, which looked like one of Dante's visions of hell-fire, one of our soldiers was signalling with a flaming torch.

The red flame moved backwards and forwards through the wrack of smoke, and was then tossed high, as a new burst of shrapnel broke over the place where the signaller stood.

Our batteries were firing single rounds and salvos in the direction of Contalmaison from many places behind our lines, so that I was in the centre of a circle of guns all concentrating upon the enemy's lines behind Fricourt and Mametz Wood and La Boisselle. Shells from our heavies came screaming overhead with a high rising note which ends with a sudden roar as the shell bursts, and our field-batteries were firing rapidly and continuously so that the sharp crack of each shot seemed to rip the air as though it were made of calico.

It was a tornado of shell-fire, and though one's head ached at it and each big shell as it travelled over seemed in a queer way to take something from one's vitality by its rush of air, there was a strange exultation in one's senses at the consciousness of this mass of artillery supporting our men. Those were our guns. Ours!

They had the mastery. They were all registered on the enemy. Our guns at last had given us a great chance. The infantry had something behind them, and it was not all flesh and blood against great engines, as in the early days it used to be.

2

The enemy was replying chiefly on the ground about La Boisselle, so that I hated to think of our men up there, for though it was nothing like our bombardment it was heavy enough to increase the cost we have had to pay for progress. I could see nothing of the men in that smoke and flame, but I could see men going up towards it, in a quiet, leisurely way as though strolling on a summer morning in peaceful fields.

It was curious to watch our soldiers walking about this battlefield. They seemed very aimless, in little groups, wandering about as though picking wild flowers—some of those poppies which made great splashes of scarlet up to the trenches, or some of the blue cornflowers and purple scabious and white stitchwort which weaved the colours of France over these poor stricken fields of hers, now hers again, and the charlock which ran with a riot of gold in all this great luxuriance between the tumbled earthworks where dead bodies lay.

The shells were whining and rending the air above their heads, but they did not glance upwards or forwards to where the shells burst and vomited black smoke. They seemed as careless of war as holiday-makers on Hampstead Heath. Yet when I went among them I found that each man had his special mission, and was part of a general purpose guided by higher powers. Some of them were laying new wires for new telephones over ground just captured from the enemy.

Others were runners coming down with messages through the barrage higher up the roads. Artillerymen and engineers were getting on with their job, quietly, without fuss.

From over the ridge where Crucifix Trench runs from the Poodles into Fricourt Wood came a body of men. I could see their heads above the trench. Then they seemed to rest a while. After that they came into full view below the ridge.

Had they been seen by the German gunners? Why were they running like that down the slope? Some shrapnel-clouds came white and curly above the sky-line; others fluffed lower,

nearer to the men. They were in such a bunch that one shell would do great damage there. . . .

They scattered a little and I saw their figures taking cover in the hummocky ridges. It was only later that I heard that these men had been fighting heavily down near the two trees known as the Poodles, and that they had captured a number of German prisoners, who came towards them with uplifted hands. The prisoners were being brought down in small batches, whom I met on the road.

3

Up at La Boisselle the shelling was still intense, but our troops had already surrounded part of the position, and after a concentration by our guns advanced and captured it. A number of Germans were there in their dug-outs, the remnant of a battalion which had suffered frightful things under our gun-fire. Some of the officers, it seems, from what the prisoners told me, went away to Bush Tree Copse, Contalmaison, saying that they were going to bring up reserves. But they did not come back.

The other men—about 250 of them—stayed in the dug-outs, without food and water, while our shells made a fury above them and smashed up the ground. They had a German doctor there, a giant of a man with a great heart, who had put his first-aid dressing-station in the second-line trench and attended to the wounds of the men until our bombardment intensified so that no man could live there.

He took the wounded down to a dug-out—those who had not been carried back—and stayed there expecting death. But then, as he told me to-day, at about eleven o'clock this morning the shells ceased to scream and roar above-ground, and after a sudden silence he heard the noise of British troops. He went up to the entrance of his dug-out and said to some English soldiers who came up with fixed bayonets, "My friends, I surrender." Afterwards he helped to tend our own wounded, and did very good work for us under the fire of his own guns, which had now turned upon this position.

There was another German to-day at La Boisselle, but his work was not that of helping wounded men. It was one of those machine-gunners who kept up a fire of dropping bullets

upon our troops when we first made an assault upon this position. And to-day he was there still in his emplacement doing very deadly work, and though he was wounded in nine places when we found him he was still working his terrible little gun.

Our men took him prisoner, and, in the English way, bore no grudge against him, but sang his praises. Many other machine-guns were captured, and round one of them all the team was laid out dead by one of our shells.

4

At about 11.30 in the morning I walked down into Fricourt, which was captured yesterday afternoon. It was a strange walk, not pleasant, but full of a terrible interest. Fighting was still going on on the high ground above, a few hundred yards away, and while I had been watching the scene of war from a field near by I had seen heavy shells, certainly five-point-nines, falling near the village and raising clouds of black and greenish smoke, and they were falling into Mametz some distance to the right.

Fricourt was not an inviting place, but other men had been there at a worse time. And the interest of it called to one to get into this bit of ruined ground with its broken brickwork which for more than a year we have stared at across barbed wire and through holes in the ground as an evil place beyond our knowledge, as a place from which death came to our men from trench-mortars and machine-guns, separated from us by lines of trenches full of snipers who waited and watched for any of our heads to appear, even for a second, above the parapet, and by No Man's Land into which some of our brave boys went out at night at great peril, hiding in shell-holes, and avoiding the mine-fields of the Bois Français and other ground honeycombed below by German galleries which, night after night—do you remember the line in the official communiqué?—flung up the soil and formed another crater and buried some more of our men. "There was mining activity near Fricourt." Well, there will be no more of it there.

I went across the fields—Lord God! that would have meant death a week or two ago, before the enemy was busy with other things close by—and came down to our old system of trenches. Here were the little wooden bridges across which our men

made their advance, and litters of sandbags no more to be used for the parapets here, and the abandoned properties of men who had left these old familiar places—the old rat-holes, the bays in the trenches where they stood on guard at night, the dug-outs where they had pinned up photographs—upon the morning of the great adventure, which was yesterday.

Here was a redoubt from which I had first looked across to the Crucifix and the communication-trench up which the men used to come at night. Now all abandoned, for the men had gone forward.

The flowers were growing richly in No Man's Land, red and yellow and blue, except where the earth was white and barren above the mine-fields of the famous Tambour, and brown and barren in the Bois Français, where never a tree now grows.

We walked across No Man's Land in the full sunlight of this July day, and though shells were rushing overhead, those from our batteries seemed low enough to cut off the heads of the flowers, and mine. They were mostly our shells.

Lightly wounded men, just hit up there beyond the wood, walked along unaided, or helped by a comrade. One of them, a boy of 18 or so, with blue eyes under his steel helmet, stopped me and showed me a bloody bandage round his hand, and said with an excited laugh:

"They got me all right. I was serving my Lewis when a bullet caught me smack. Now I'm off. And I've had 18 months of it."

He went away grinning at his luck, because the bullet might have chosen another place.

Some German prisoners followed him. Two of them were carrying a stretcher on which an English soldier lay with his eyes shut. A wounded German behind turned and smiled at me—a strong, meaningful smile. He was glad to be wounded and out of it.

Other Germans came down under guard, and little groups of English soldiers and Red Cross men. I struck across the field again to the old German lines of trenches, and saw the full and frightful horror of war. The German trenches were smashed at some places, by our artillery-fire, into shapelessness. Green sandbags were flung about, timbers from the trench sides had been broken and tossed about like match-sticks.

I stumbled from one shell-crater to another, over bits of

indescribable things, and the litter of men's tunics and pouches and haversacks, and dug-outs. Rifles lay about, and the ground was strewn with hand-grenades, and here and there was a great unexploded shell which had nosed into the soil. There were many German dead lying there in Fricourt, and some of our own poor men. The Germans were lying thick in one part of the trenches.

They had been tall, fine men in life. One of them lying with many wounds upon him was quite a giant. Another poor man lay on his back with his face turned up to the blue sky and his hands raised up above his body as though in prayer. . . .

But I turned my head away from these sights, as most people hide these things from their imagination, too cowardly to face the reality of war.

I followed an officer down into a German dug-out until he halted half-way down its steps and spoke a word of surprise.

"There's a candle still burning!"

It gave one an uncanny feeling to see that lighted candle in the deep subterranean room, where yesterday German officers were living, unless dead before yesterday.

It could not have been burning all that time. For a moment we thought an enemy might still be hiding there, and it was not improbable, as two of them had been found in Fricourt only a few hours before. But in all likelihood it had been lit by an English soldier after the capture of the place.

The dug-out was littered with German books and papers. I picked up one of them, and saw that it was "Advice on Sport." Here was sad sport for Germans. There was a tragic spirit in that little room, and we went out quickly. I peered into other German dug-outs, and saw how splendidly built they were, so deep and so strongly timbered that not even our bombardment had utterly destroyed them. They are great workers, these Germans, and wonderful soldiers.

Everywhere there lay about great numbers of steel helmets, some of them with vizors, and well designed, so that they come down to the nape of the neck and protect all the head. Some of our soldiers were bringing them back as souvenirs. One man had ten dangling about him, like the tin pots on a travelling tinker.

In the wood beyond the Crucifix our machine-guns were

firing fiercely, and the noise was like that of a great flame beyond the village. Fricourt itself is just a heap of frightful ruin, with the remains of houses which the enemy had used as machine-gun emplacements. Every yard of it was littered with the debris of war's aftermath. Before our final attack yesterday many of the German troops filtered out in retreat, leaving some of their wounded behind, and one poor puppy—a fox-terrier—which is now the trophy of one of our battalions.

But a number of men—about 150, I should say—could not get away owing to the intensity of our first bombardment, and when our men stormed the place yesterday afternoon they came up out of their dug-outs with their hands up for mercy. I saw them all to-day and spoke with some of them.

They belonged to the 109th, 110th, and 111th Regiments of the 14th Reserve Corps, and were mostly from Baden. It would be absurd to talk of these fellows as being undersized or underfed men. They were tall, strong, stout men in the prime of life. Only a few were wounded, and lay about in a dazed way. The others answered me cheerfully, and expressed their joy at having escaped from our gunfire, which they described as "schrecklich"—terrible. They had had no food or drink since yesterday morning until their English guards gave it to them.

I spoke also with a little group of officers. They were young men of an aristocratic type, and spoke very frankly and politely. They, too, acknowledged the new power of our artillery and the courage of our men, which was not new to them. It was here that I had a talk with the German medical officer whom I had seen walking down between two guards close to Fricourt. After describing his own experiences during the bombardment this morning he laughed in a sad way.

"This war!" he said. "We go on killing each other to no purpose. Europe is being bled to death, and will be impoverished for long years. It is a war against religion, and against civilization, and I see no end to it. Germany is strong and England is strong and France is strong. It is impossible for one side to crush the other, so when is the end to come?" Because of his services to our own men he was given special privileges, and an English soldier had brought down all his personal belongings. A little apart from all his fellow-officers stood a German lieutenant-colonel who was charged with

having killed two of our officers by bombing them after his surrender. A tall, gloomy, truculent man of the worst Prussian type, he stood awaiting an inquiry, and I could only hope that he was not guilty of such a crime.

From personal observation I know nothing of what has happened elsewhere in the line to-day, but I have heard a story of an attack on the Gommecourt salient which shows that this action was one of the most tragic and heroic things in British history. The enemy had concentrated a great mass of guns here in the belief that our main attack was to be directed against this part of the front. The existence of this belief has been proved by German orders which have come into our hands.

As soon as our men left their trenches after the bombardment yesterday the enemy barraged our front and support trenches with a most infernal fire. Our men advanced through this barrage absolutely as though on parade, and in spite of heavy losses some of them made their way over 500 yards of No Man's Land to the enemy's front line.

The German soldiers also behaved with great courage, and carried their machine-guns right through our barrage until they faced our men in the open and swept them with fire so that large numbers fell.

The attack did not succeed in this part of the line. But it drew on the enemy's reserves, and great honour is due to the valour of those men of ours who fought as heroes in one of the most glorious acts of self-sacrifice ever made by British troops.

IV

THE DEATH-SONG OF THE GERMANS

Morning bright; morning bright—
  Light that leads me to the grave—
Soon shall dawn with summons brazen
Call me to my death to hasten—
  I and many a comrade brave.
"Morgenroth" (Dr. Blackie's translation)

"Morgenroth," the haunting death-song of the forlorn hopes of the German armies, is the song which was sung so often in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and is being sung again to-day.

The words were written by Wilhelm Hauff, a patriotic German writer of the first half of the nineteenth century.

1

JULY 4

No sensational progress has been made by us since I wrote my last dispatch, yesterday, but our guns are in a good position to follow up our advance, and the battle is developing, I believe, according to the original plan, which anticipated slow and steady fighting from one German position to another. That is being done, and another point was gained to-day by the capture of Bernafay Wood, to the north-east of Montauban, from which I have just come back after seeing the shelling of this wood from close range.

It is behind the lines on the outskirts of the battlefields that one sees most of the activity of war, as I saw it to-day again when I went up to this captured ground of Montauban. Up there where fighting was in progress not many men were visible. Until the advance, after the work of our guns, and the short, sharp rush from open ground under the enemy's shrapnel, our men are hidden and the only movement to be seen is that of the shells bursting and tossing up the earth.

But on the way up, now that the war is no longer stationary,

there is a great turmoil of men and mules and guns and wagons, and again and again to-day I wished that I could put on to paper sketches rather than words to describe these scenes. For here all along the way were historic pictures of the campaign full of life and colour.

Great camps had been assembled in the dips and hollows of the hills, with painted tents between the lines and great masses of horses and wagons and gun-limbers crowded together, with thousands of men busy as ants. Transport columns came down or went up the hilly roads driven by tired men who drooped in their seats or saddles after three days of battle, in which they have had but little sleep. One of them was asleep to-day. He had fallen backwards in his wagon still holding the reins, and while he slept his horses jogged on steadily following the leaders of the column. On the roadside and among the wild flowers of uncultivated fields batches of infantry, who had been marching all night, had flung themselves down and slept also while they had a half-hour's chance, with their arms outstretched, with their rifles and packs for their pillows.

Other men were moving up towards the fighting-lines, marching with a steady tramp along the chalky roads, which plastered them with white dust from steel helmet downwards, and put a white mask upon their faces, except where the sweat came down in gullies. Artillerymen were leading up reserve horses, who put their ears back for a moment, as though to switch off flies, when heavy guns blared forth close to them and shells of at least 8-inch calibre went howling overhead to the enemy's lines.

At wayside corners were field dressing-stations flying the Red Cross flag, and surrounded by little parks of ambulances, where stretchermen were busy. And every now and then, at a cross-road or a by-path, a wooden notice-board directed the way in red letters and the words " Walking wounded."

This was the Via Dolorosa of men who could hobble away from the battlefield up there and get back on their legs to save transport more badly needed by stricken comrades.

Closer to the lines there was a scene which would make one weep if one had the weakness of tears after two years of war. Our dead were being buried in a newly made cemetery, and some of their comrades were standing by the open graves and

sorting out the crosses—the little wooden crosses which grow in such a harvest across these fields of France.

They were white above the brown earth, and put into neat rows, and labelled with strips of tin bearing the names of those who now have peace.

French troops were mingled among our own men. A working party of them came along shouldering picks and shovels. They were Territorials, past the fighting age, but tall, sturdy, hardened men, with a likeness to their young sons, who, with less weight but with the same hard bronzed look, are fighting the new battles of the war.

It was the sound of French guns away to the south which was making most commotion in the air to-day. Big fighting was going on there, as though the French were making a further advance, and the "rafale" of their field-guns was incessant and like the roll of many drums.

2

As I went over the battlefield of Montauban the enemy's shells and our own were falling over Bernafay Wood, where each side held part of the ground. A little to my left Mametz was being pounded heavily by the German gunners, and they were flinging shrapnel and "crumps" into the ragged fringe of trees just in front of me, which marks the place where the village of Montauban once stood. They were also barraging a line of trench just below the trees, and keeping a steady flow of five-point-nines into one end of the wood to the right of Montauban, for which our men are now fighting.

Other shells came with an irregular choice of place over the battlefield, and there were moments when those clouds of black shrapnel overhead suggested an immediate dive into the nearest dug-out.

I passed across our old line of trenches, from which on Saturday morning our men went out cheering to that great attack which carried them to the farthest point gained that day, in spite of heavy losses. The trenches now were filled with litter collected from the battlefield—stacks of rifles and kit, piles of hand-grenades, no longer needed by those who owned them.

This old system of trenches, in which French troops lived

for many months of war before they handed them over to our men, was like a ruined and deserted town left hurriedly because of plague, and in great disorder. Letters were lying about, and bully-beef tins, and cartridge-clips. Our men had gone forward and these old trenches are abandoned.

It is beyond the power of words to give a picture of the German trenches over this battlefield of Montauban, where we now hold the line through the wood beyond. Before Saturday last it was a wide and far-reaching network of trenches, with many communication ways, and strong traverses and redoubts —so that one would shiver at their strength to see them marked on a map. No mass of infantry, however great, would have dared to assault such a position with bombs and rifles.

It was a great underground fortress, which any body of men could have held against any others for all time apart from the destructive power of heavy artillery. But now! . . . Why now it was the most frightful convulsion of earth that the eyes of man could see.

The bombardment by our guns had tossed all these earthworks into vast rubbish-heaps. We had made this ground one vast series of shell-craters, so deep and so broad that it was like a field of extinct volcanoes.

The ground rose and fell in enormous waves of brown earth, so that standing above one crater I saw before me these solid billows with 30-feet slopes stretching away like a sea frozen after a great storm. We had hurled thousands of shells from our heaviest howitzers and long-range guns into this stretch of field.

3

I saw here and touched here the awful result of that great gunfire which I had watched from the centre of our batteries on the morning of July 1. That bombardment had annihilated the German position. Even many of the dug-outs, going 30 feet deep below the earth and strongly timbered and cemented, had been choked with masses of earth so that many dead bodies lay buried there. But some had been left in spite of the upheaval of earth around them, and into some of these I crept down, impelled by the strong grim spell of those little dark rooms below where German soldiers lived only a few days ago.

They seemed haunted by the spirits of the men who had

made their homes here and had carried into these holes the pride of their souls, and any poetry they had in their hearts, and their hopes and terrors, and memories of love and life in the good world of peace. I could not resist going down to such places, though to do so gave me gooseflesh.

I had to go warily, for on the stairways were unexploded bombs of the " hair-brush " style. A stumble or a kick might send one to eternity by high-explosive force, and it was difficult not to stumble, for the steps were broken or falling into a landslide.

Down inside the little square rooms were filled with the relics of German officers and men. The deal tables were strewn with papers, on the wooden bedsteads lay blue-grey overcoats. Wine bottles, photograph albums, furry haversacks, boots, belts, kit of every kind had all been tumbled together by British soldiers who had come here after the first rush to the enemy's trenches and searched for men in hiding.

There were men in hiding now, though harmless. In one of the dug-outs where I groped my way down it was pitch-dark. I stumbled against something, and fumbled for my matches. When I struck a light I saw in a corner of the room a German.

He lay curled up, with his head on his arm, as though asleep. I did not stay to look at his face, but went up quickly. And yet I went down others and lingered in one where no corpse lay because of the tragic spirit that dwelt there and put its spell on me. I picked up some letters.

They were all written to " dear brother Wilhelm " from sisters and brothers, sending him their loving greetings, praying that his health was good, promising to send him gifts of food, and yearning for his home-coming. " Since your last letter and card," said one of them, " we have heard nothing more from you.

" Every time the postman comes we hope for a little note from you. . . . Dear Wilhelm, in order to be patient with your fate you must thank God because you have found fortune in misfortune."

Poor, pitiful letters! I was ashamed to read them because it seemed like prying into another man's secrets, though he was dead.

There was a little book I picked up. It is a book of soldiers'

songs, full of old German sentiment, about "the little mother" and the old house at home and the pretty girl who kissed her soldier boy before he went off to the war. And here is the sad old "Morgenlied," which has been sung along many roads of France.

"Red morning sun! Red morning sun! Do you light me to an early death? Soon will the trumpets sound, and I must leave this life, and many a comrade with me.

"I scarcely thought my joy would end like this. Yesterday I rode a proud steed; to-day I am shot through the chest; to-morrow I shall be in the cold grave, O red morning sun!"

On the front page of this book, which I found to-day at Montauban, there is an Army Order from Prince von Rupprecht of Bavaria to the soldiers of the Sixth Army.

"We have the fortune," it says, "to have the English on our front, the troops of those people whose envy for years has made them work to surround us with a ring of enemies in order to crush us. It is to them that we owe this bloody and most horrible war. . . . Here is the antagonist who stands most in the way of the restoration of peace. Forward!"

It seemed to me that the preface by Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria spoilt the sentiment in the German folk-songs, which were full of love rather than of hate.

4

I stood again above-ground, in the shell-craters. Other shells were coming over my head with their indescribable whooping, and the black shrapnel was still bursting about the fields, and the Germans were dropping five-point-nines along a line a hundred yards away.

"Be careful about those dug-outs," said an officer. "Some of them have charged mines inside, and there may be Germans still hiding in them."

Two Germans were found hiding there to-day. Some of our men found themselves being sniped, and after a search found that the shots were coming from a certain section of trench in which there were communicating dug-outs.

After cunning trappers' work they isolated one dug-out in which the snipers were concealed.

"Come out of that," shouted our men. "Surrender like good boys."

But the only answer they had was a shot.

The dug-out was bombed, but the men went through an underground passage into another one. Then a charge of ammonal was put down and the dug-out blown to bits.

This afternoon, while I was still on the battlefield of Montauban, a great thunder-storm broke. It was sudden and violent, and rain fell in sheets. The sky became black with a greenish streak in it when the lightning forked over the high wooded ridges towards La Boisselle and above Fricourt Wood.

"Heaven's artillery!" said an officer, and his words were not flippant. There was something awe-inspiring in the darkness that closed in upon these battlefields and the great rolls of thunder that mingled with the noise of the guns. Artillery observation was impossible, but the guns still fired, and their flashes were as vivid as the lightning, revealing through the murk the dark figures of marching men, and the black woods slashed with shell-fire just above Montauban. In a little while the low-lying ground was flooded, so that the guns in the valleys were in water, and the horse transport splashed through ponds, scattering fountains above their axles, and rivers ran down the broken trenches of the old German line.

I stood in the storm watching this scene of war, and the gloom and terror of it closed about me.

V

THE ATTACK ON THE LEFT

1

JULY 5

LAST night and this morning the enemy made attempts to drive our men out of their positions at Thiépval, but were repulsed with heavy losses. Their bombers advanced in strong numbers upon the Leipzig Trench, south of the village of Thiépval, and at the same time north of the cemetery to St.-Pierre-Divion, but in neither case did they have any success.

At other parts of the line, between La Boisselle and Montauban, there were bombardments by the enemy's batteries and by our own; and by hard fighting we have captured Peak Trench and the important system of trenches known as the Quadrangle, north-east of La Boisselle and on the way to Contalmaison.

Standing to-day on the battlefield north of Ovillers-La Boisselle I was able to look over a wide area of the zone of fire and to see our new positions. Straight in front of me was Thiépval Wood, marked by a ragged fringe of broken trees, through which appeared the ruins of the village.

Heavy shells were falling there and our shrapnel was bursting thickly upon the high ground held by the enemy. To the left of me was Beaumont-Hamel, opposite Auchonvillers, and the village of Authuille.

It is historic ground. A hundred years hence men of our blood will come here with reverence as to sacred soil. For over this stretch of country, a few miles wide, has been fought one of the great battles of history, and here many thousands of our men advanced upon the enemy with a spirit of marvellous self-sacrifice, beyond the ordinary courage of men.

They faced hellish fires, but without faltering. There was

not one man who turned and fled at a time when the bravest of them might have quailed. They were all heroes worthy of the highest honour which may be given for valour in the field. Something supernatural seemed to animate these battalions of English boys and these battalions of Irish and Scots, so that they went forward into furnace fires at Beaumont-Hamel and Gommecourt as though to fair fields, and when many of them stood in the very presence of death it was to the cry of "No surrender!" Then they went forward again to meet their fate.

2

Their losses were heavy. It is tragic as well as wonderful, this story of our advance upon the German lines, when we captured their trenches by an assault that could not be resisted at first even by overwhelming gun-fire. I have spoken to Brigadiers who mourn many of their dear men. The agony in their eyes made it difficult to face them. The number of casualties was high throughout the whole length of front on the left of our attack, and inevitable because the valour of the men counted no cost in their assault against positions terribly strong, as they knew, but not stronger than their resolve to carry them.

The enemy's losses were frightful too, and his courage great. It was because very brave men were on both sides that the battlefield in this region was strewn with stricken men.

They were men of the North Country who were on the left of our attack between Ovillers-La Boisselle and a point south of Hébuterne. As soon as our bombardment lifted at 7.30 on the morning of July 1 the brigade left its trenches and advanced line by line in perfect order as though on parade.

The ground in front of them was wrecked by our shell-fire. Several times during the bombardment the trenches had heaved and changed their form, so that all the contours of the earth were altered. But there were many men still left alive below-ground in the German dug-outs, those deep dug-outs of theirs that go below the reach of even the heaviest shells, and with them were many machine-guns and deadly weapons.

Behind them also was a great concentration of artillery, for it is evident that the enemy had expected attack here, perhaps our main attack, and had massed his heaviest guns at this

point. His barrage was immense in its effect of fire upon our trenches and the ground between ours and his. To reach his line our men had to pass through a wall of bursting shells. Our own barrage continued intensely, but at the moment of the infantry attack the German soldiers stood up on their parapets in the very face of this bombardment and fired upon our advancing men with automatic rifles.

Their machine-gunners also showed an extreme courage, and with amazing audacity forced their way over the broken parapets into No Man's Land and swept our ranks with a scythe of bullets. Numbers of our men dropped, but others went on, charging the machine-guns with fixed bayonets, hurling bombs at the men on the parapets, and forcing their way into and across the German trenches. Wave after wave followed, and those who did not fall went on, into the enemy's first line, into the enemy's second line, then on again to his third line, and by a kind of miracle even to his fourth line. There were men who went as far as Serre. They never came back.

The enemy's guns kept up a continuous bombardment from 7.30 till midday, like an incessant roll of drums, and the ground over which our men continued to advance was cratered like a system of trous-de-loup. An orderly who tried to come back with a message from the men in front was buried three times on his way, but struggled out and delivered his report. Human courage could not reach greater heights than these men showed.

3

On the right of these North-countrymen were other bodies of troops from the West of England, the Midlands, and Eastern Counties, with battalions of Irish and Scottish troops. They, too, had to face a great ordeal. When they went towards the German trenches, not at a rush, but at parade step, under a storm of shells, the enemy came up out of their dug-outs with machine-guns and rifles, and fought very stubbornly even when the Midland men and other English troops reached them with bombs and bayonets. There was a fierce corps-à-corps in the first-line trench until most of the enemy were killed.

Then our men went on to the second German line under still fiercer fire. By this time they were in an inferno of shell-

fire and smoke, as nothing was seen of them by artillery observers until at 8.45 some rockets went up very far into the German lines, showing that some of the Territorials had got as far as their last objective. Some of the infantry (they were two of the Essex Regiments and the King's Own of the 4th Division) went as far as Pendant Copse south-east of Serre. Messages came through from them. Urgent messages calling for help. "For God's sake send us bombs."

But the enemy's gun-fire was so violent and so deep in its barrage that nothing could pass through it, and it was impossible to send up relief to men who had gone too far in their keen desire to break the German lines.

A little farther south were some Irish, Welsh, and Scottish troops. When they left their trenches our bombardment was still at its full weight, but suddenly the noise of it was obliterated entirely, so that not a gun was heard, by a new and more terrible sound.

It was the sound as though great furnace fires were weeping flames across No Man's Land with a steady blast, and it came from German machine-guns in the stronghold of Beaumont-Hamel and from more German machine-guns in concrete emplacements which had escaped our gun-fire upon the enemy's trenches.

Many of our men fell. Some of the Irish troops (the Ulster men) lost severely. But other ranks marched on, not quickly, but at a quiet leisurely pace, never faltering as gaps were made in their ranks.

Some of them did not even trouble to wear their steel casques, but carried them, as though for future use if need be. And they went across the German trenches and right ahead into the very heart of a storm of fire, too quickly, in spite of their calm way of going, because they did not clear the German dug-outs as they passed, and men came out and bombed them from the rear. South of Beaumont-Hamel were some other battalions, whose advance was upon Thiépval Wood, and they fought with extraordinary resolution and hardihood.

It was they who shouted "No surrender!" as their battle-cry, and these tough, hard, gallant men forced their way forward over ground raked by every kind of shot and shell. The enemy's trenches could not resist their attack, and they stormed their way through, killing many of the enemy who resisted

them. In Thiépval Wood, where the trees were slashed by shrapnel, they collected their strength, formed into line, and stood the shock of several German counter-attacks. Then they charged and flung down the enemy's ranks, taking more than 200 prisoners.

Another counter-attack was made upon the soldiers who had forced their way to the outskirts of Thiépval village, from which there came an incessant chatter of machine-gun fire. Some of them were cut off from all support, but they fought forward, and the shout of "No surrender!" came from them again, though they were sure of death.

This attack by our troops on the left of the theatre of attack is one of the greatest revelations of human courage ever seen in history. The tragedy of it—for the loss of many brave men makes it tragic—is brightened by the shining valour of all these splendid soldiers, to whom death, in those great hours, had no kind of terror.

The lightly wounded men who came back, and there were large numbers of lightly wounded men, were proud of their adventure and hopeful of victory. They had no panic in their eyes or hearts. It was a weary walk for many of them down to the Red House, where their wounds were stanched. They had two miles to go, and it was a long two miles to men weak from the loss of blood, dizzy, tired to the point of death. Some of them staggered and fell at the very gate of the dressing-station, but even then they spoke brave words and said, "We've got 'em on the run!"

The enemy behaved well, I am told, to our wounded men at some parts of the line, and helped them over the parapets. This makes us loath to tell other stories not so good. Let us not think, just now, of the ugliness of battle, but rather of the beauty of these men of ours, who were forgetful of self and faced the cruellest fire with a high and noble courage.

VI

THE LONDON MEN AT GOMMECOURT

JULY 19

As long ago as Loos, which seems an enormous time ago, it was proved that London produces men of great fighting qualities, not weakened by City life, and, in spite of more sensitive nerves than country-bred men, able to stand the strain of battle just as well, with a quick intelligence in a tight corner, and with pride and imagination that do not let them surrender self-respect.

"London men fight on their nerves," said one of our Generals the other day, "but they make great soldiers. More stolid men often give way to shell-shock and strain more easily than the Londoner, with all his sensibility."

In our great attack of July 1 some of the London battalions again showed a very fine courage and a most self-sacrificing devotion to duty in hours of supreme ordeal.

They broke the German line at Gommecourt and when ill-luck beset them on either side, so that they found themselves in utterly untenable positions, with heavy losses, they held on stubbornly against the enemy's counter-attacks, and suffered all that war can make men suffer—there is hardly a limit to that, God knows—with Stoic endurance.

These men belonged to old Volunteer regiments, famous in times of peace, when once a year young City clerks and professional men took a fortnight's leave at Easter for manœuvres on Salisbury Plain, and came back rather stiff and rather bronzed, with stories of sham-fights and jolly bivouacs at night, and smoking concerts with good fellows who lead a chorus. It was a great adventure—in times of peace!

But even when the Volunteers changed their form into the

Territorials and war tightened up in discipline, and attended more drills and had a harder time in camp, no man guessed that before a year or two had passed the Queen's Westminsters would be fighting through hell-fire in France, or that "the old Vics"—the Queen Victoria Rifles—would be smashing through German barbed wire under machine-gun fire, or that the Rangers and the London Rifle Brigade and the London Scottish would be crossing ground, strewn with dead and wounded, in a storm of high explosives.

Punch made funny pictures about this amateur soldiering. The "Terriers" were not thought to count for much by military critics who had seen service in South Africa. . . .

Well, in this war the Territorial infantry and the Territorial gunners have counted for a great deal, and during these last few days they have proved themselves, once again, great soldiers—great in attack and great in resistance.

2

When the four leading battalions left their trenches near Gommecourt at 7.30 after the great bombardment of the German position they had a long way to go before they reached the enemy's front lines.

No Man's Land was a broad stretch of ground, 400 yards across in some parts, and not less than 200 yards at the narrowest point.

It was a long, long journey in the open, for 50 yards, or 20, are long enough to become a great graveyard if the enemy's machine-guns get to work.

But they advanced behind dense smoke-clouds, which rolled steadily towards the German trenches and kept down the machine-gunners in their dug-outs. Unlike the experience of most of our men in other parts of the line, they escaped lightly from machine-gun fire, and their chief risk was from the barrage of shell-fire which the enemy flung across No Man's Land with some intensity.

But the Londoners started forward to this line of high explosives and went on and through at a quick pace, in open order. On the left was the London Rifle Brigade, in the centre came the Rangers and "Vics," on the right the London Scottish, and, behind, the Queen's Westminsters and Kensingtons, who were to advance through the others.

Men fell across the open ground, caught by flying bits of shell or buried by the great bursts of high explosives which opened up the earth. But the others did not look back, afraid to weaken themselves by the sight of their stricken comrades, and at a great pace, half walking and half running, reached the German line. It was no longer a system of trenches.

It was a sea of earth with solid waves. Our heavy guns had annihilated parapet and parados, smashed the timbers into matchwood, strewn sandbags into rubbish-heaps, and made a great wreckage. But German industry below-ground was proof against all this shell-fire, and many of the dug-outs still stood.

They were full of Germans, for the line was strongly held, and many of these men came up with their machine-guns and bombs to resist the attack. But the Londoners sprang upon them, swept over them, and captured the front network of trenches with amazing speed.

It was not a steady-going business, slow and deliberate. The quick mind of the London man spurred him to quick action.

He did not linger to collect souvenirs, or to chat with English-speaking Germans. "London leads!" was the shout of Victorias and Westminsters.

The London Scottish were racing forward on the right with their brown kilts swinging across the broken ground. But the officers kept their heads and as much order as possible at such a time.

They held back enough men to clear the dug-outs and collect prisoners—the best kind of souvenirs.

Two hundred of them were captured in the dug-outs and brought up and sent back over the place that had been No Man's Land and now, for a time, was ours.

At least 200 came back, but there were many more who never got back, though they started on the journey under armed guard.

3

The enemy's artillery was increasing the density of the barrage upon our old front-line trenches and the ground in front of them.

He made a wall of high explosives through which no living

thing could pass. The escorts and their prisoners tried to pass—and failed.

At the time the London men fighting forward did not think of that barrage behind them. They were eager to get on, to be quick over the first part of their business before taking breath for the next.

And they got on with astounding speed. In less than the time it has taken me to write this narrative No Man's Land had been crossed, the trenches had been taken, the prisoners collected and sent back on their way, and German strongholds and redoubts behind the first system of trench-work had been seized by London regiments.

It would have taken them longer to walk from Charing Cross to St. Paul's Churchyard with no Germans in the way. It was the quickest bit of work that has been done by any freemen of the city.

The Riflemen had swarmed into a strong point on the left, knocking out the machine-guns, and on the right the London Scots were holding a strong redoubt in a very ugly corner of ground. Everything had been won that London had been asked to win.

Before some hours had passed these London soldiers knew that they were in a death-trap and cut off from escape.

Owing to the great strength of the enemy to the right and left of the position, where they had concentrated masses of guns and where the ground was more difficult to carry, the troops on either side of the Londoners, in spite of heroic courage and complete self-sacrifice, had advanced so far.

The London men had therefore thrust forward a salient into the German lines, and were enclosed by the enemy.

Behind them, on the way to their own lines, the enemy's barrage was steadily becoming more violent. Having stopped the other attacks to the north and south, he was now able to concentrate the fire of his guns upon the ground in the London area, and by the early afternoon he had smashed our trenches and communication-trenches, while still flinging out a line of high explosives to prevent supports coming up to the men who were in the captured salient.

They were cut off, and had no other means of rescue but their own courage.

Desperate efforts were made by their comrades behind to

send up supplies of ammunition and other means of defence. The carrying parties attempted again and again to cross No Man's Land, but suffered heavy casualties.

One party of 60 men, with supplies of hand-grenades, set out on this journey, but only three came back. Single men went on with a few grenades, determined to carry some kind of support to the men in front, but fell dead or wounded before they reached their goal.

On the right the London Scottish were holding on to their redoubt, building barricades and beating off the German bombers. But as the hours passed ammunition became scarce. Our supplies of bombs were almost exhausted, here and there quite exhausted. The London men went about collecting German bombs, and for some time these served, but not enough could be found to maintain effective fire. The position became more ugly.

But the men did not lose heart. In those bad hours there were many men who showed great qualities of courage, and were great captains whatever their rank. One officer—to mention only one—was splendid when things were worst.

He had taken command of a company when his senior officer was killed in the first assault, and kept his men in good heart so that they could organize a defence against the enemy's counter-attacks.

They were surrounded by German grenadiers and suffered heavily from artillery, machine-gun, and sniping fire. The number of the wounded increased steadily. The bombing party keeping the enemy back flung all their bombs, and then had empty hands and were helpless. Not many rounds of ammunition were left for the riflemen. After that there would be no defence. But the officer would not give way to hopelessness. He rallied six or seven good men about him, and ordered the others to retreat with the wounded and take their chance across No Man's Land while he put up a last fight.

With his small band he held the barricade until the others had gone away, and held on still until all but two of his men were killed.

He was the last to leave, and by a miracle of luck came back to his own lines unwounded, except for a few scars and scratches. The courage of the man and his fine spirit saved the situation at the most critical time, and saved also many good lives.

There were many men of fine valour there. Men of London, not bred for war, and liking life as one sees it when there are pretty faces in Kensington Gardens, and when there's sunlight on the windows in the Strand, and when the dome of St. Paul's rises like a white cloud above the buses in Ludgate Hill.

4

One of them was a lance-corporal who was wounded in two places, so badly that his right arm hung useless by his side. But he would not give in.

"If I can't use a weapon," he said, "I can give a lead to my chums." And he gave them a lead, taking charge of a group of men holding the left flank of a position, organizing them into bombing parties, and directing them to build barricades. He held on to his post until the German attack became too strong, and he was the last to leave.

A boy in the London Scottish—I played at ball with him once in an old garden when there was laughter in the world—escaped death by a kind of miracle.

The trench he was in, with forty men, was being shelled to bits, and rather than fall into the hands of the Germans he decided to attempt escape. With one of his sergeants he made his way towards our lines, but had only gone a short distance when the sergeant was shot dead.

A bullet came a moment later and struck my friend. It was deflected from his brandy-flask and went through his thigh, knocking him head over heels into a shell-hole. Here he lay for some hours until it was dark, when he succeeded in crawling back to his lines.

He was the only one saved of his forty comrades.

Gradually the men withdrew, straggling back across No Man's Land, which was still under great shell-fire, so that the way of escape was full of peril.

It was the turn of the stretcher-bearers, and they worked with great courage. And here one must pay a tribute to the enemy.

"We had white men against us," said one of the officers, "and they let us get in our wounded without hindrance as soon as the fight was over."

It is only fair to say that they acted with humanity, and one

wishes to God that they would not use such foul means of destruction as those newly invented by chemists with devilish cruelty.

The soldiers are better than their scientists, and in this case at least they remembered the spirit of chivalry which they have not often remembered in all the foulness of this war.

It was difficult enough to get in the wounded. Many of them could not be found or brought back and stayed on the field of battle suffering great anguish for days and nights. One man who was wounded early in the battle of July 1 crawled over to three other wounded men and stayed with them until the night of July 6.

During that time he tended his comrades, who were worse than he was, and went about among dead men gathering food and water from their haversacks and bottles.

But for him his friends would have died. On the night of the 6th he succeeded in getting back to our lines across that awful stretch of No Man's Land, and then insisted upon going back as the guide of the stretcher-bearers who brought in the others.

VII

THE MEN WHO FOUGHT AT FRICOURT

1

JULY 6

THERE is something strangely inhuman in the aspect of a battle watched from the edge of its furnace fires, or even as I stood watching it within the crescent of our guns. Battalions move forward like ants across the field, and one cannot see the light in men's eyes nor distinguish between one man and another.

In this war and in this latest battle I have seen the quality of manhood uplifted to wonderful heights of courage beyond the range of normal laws; and these soldiers of ours, these fine and simple men, go forward to the highest terrors with such singing hearts that one can hardly keep a little moisture from one's eyes when they go passing on the roads.

They picked wild flowers and put them in their belts and caps—red poppies and blue cornflowers—and when the word came to march again they went forward towards the front with a fine swinging pace and smiling faces under the sweat and dust. Yet they know what battle means.

I went to-day again among the men who fought at Fricourt. Some of them had come back behind the lines, and outside their billets the divisional band was playing, but not to much of an audience, for of those who fought at Fricourt in the first assault there are not large numbers left. The officers who came round the village with me had a lonely look. After battle, such a battle as this, it is difficult to keep the sadness out of one's eyes. So many good fellows have gone. . . . But they were proud of their men. They found a joy in that. The men had done gloriously. They had won their ground and held it through frightful fire. "The men were topping."

There were a lot of Yorkshire men among them who fought at Fricourt and it was those I saw to-day. They were the heroes, with other North-country lads, of one of the most splendid achievements of British arms ever written down in history.

Some of them were still shaken. When they spoke to me their words faltered now and then, and a queer look came into their eyes. But, on the whole, they were astoundingly calm, and had not lost their sense of humour. Of the first advance over No Man's Land, which was 150 yards across to the enemy's front-line trench, some of these men could remember nothing. It was just a dreadful blank.

"I was just mad at the time" said one of them. "The first thing I know is that I found myself scrambling over the German parapets with a bomb in my hand. The dead were lying all round me."

But a sergeant there remembered all. He kept his wits about him, strangely clear at such a time. He saw that his men were being swept with machine-gun fire, so that they all lay down to escape its deadly scythe. But he saw also that the bullets were just washing the ground so that the prostrate men were being struck in great numbers.

He stood up straight and called upon the others to stand, thinking it would be better to be hit in the feet than in the head. Then he walked on and came without a scratch to the German front line.

2

Here and in the lines behind there was a wreckage of earth from our bombardment, but several of the dug-outs had been untouched and in them during our gun-fire men were sitting 30 feet down, with machine-guns ready, and long periscopes, through which they could see our lines and the first wave of advancing men. Before the word reached them, those German machine-gunners had rushed upstairs and behind the cover of their wrecked trenches fired bursts of bullets at our men.

Each gun-team had with them a rifleman who was a crack shot, and who obeyed his army orders to pick off English officers. So they sniped our young lieutenants with cool and cruel deliberation. Two of them who were dressed as privates escaped for this reason. Many of the others fell.

"With so many officers gone," said one of the Yorkshire lads, "it was every man for himself, and we carried on as best we could."

They carried on as far as the second and third lines, in a desperate fight with German soldiers who appeared out of the tumbled earth and flung bombs with a grim refusal of surrender.

"Well, if you're asking for it," said one of our men—and he hurled himself upon a great German and ran his bayonet through the man's body.

It was bloody work for boys who are not butchers by instinct. Passion caught hold of them and they saw red.

"I don't know how it was," said one of them, with a queer thoughtfulness in his eyes as he groped back to this moment of fierce excitement. "Before I went over I had no rage in me. I didn't want this hand-to-hand business. But suddenly I found myself fighting like a demon. It was my life or theirs, and I was out to kill first."

There was not much killing at that spot. When most of our men were within ten yards many of the Germans who had been flinging bombs lifted up their hands and cried "Mercy!" to those whom they had tried to blow to bits.

It was rather late to ask for mercy, but it was given to them. There was a search into the dug-outs—do you understand that all this was under great shell-fire?—and many Germans were found in hiding there.

"I surrender," said a German officer, putting his head out of a hole in the earth, "and I have a wounded man with me." "All right," said a Yorkshire sergeant; "fetch him up, and no monkey tricks."

But out of the hole came not one man, but forty, in a long file that seemed never to end, all of whom said "Kamerad!" to the sergeant, who answered, "Good day to you!—and how many more?"

They were a nuisance to him then. He wanted to get on and this was waste of time. But he sent back 42 prisoners with three lightly wounded fellows of his company—he could not spare more—and then advanced with his men beyond the German third line.

Bunches of men were straggling forward over the shell-broken ground towards the German line at Crucifix Trench, to the left of Fricourt.

They knew that this trench was important, that their lives were well given if they could capture it. And these Yorkshire boys from the hills and dales thought nothing of their lives so that they could take it.

3

They unslung their bombs, looked to the right and left, where German heavies were falling, cursed the chatter of machine-guns from Fricourt village, and said "Come on, lads!" to the men about them. Not one man faltered or turned back, or lingered with the doubt that he had gone far enough.

They stumbled forward over the shell-craters, over dead bodies, over indescribable things. Crucifix Trench was reached. It was full of Germans, who were hurling bombs from it, from that trench and the sunken road near by.

The Yorkshire boys went through a barrage of bombs, hurled their own, worried through the broken parapets and over masses of tumbled earth, and fought single fights with big Germans, like terrier dogs hunting rats and worrying them. Parties bombed their way down the sunken road.

Those who fell, struck by German bombs, shouted "Get on to 'em, lads," to others who came up. In bits of earthwork German heads looked up, white German faces, bearded, and covered with clay like dead men risen.

They put up trembling hands and cried their word of comradeship to those enemy boys.

"Well, that's all right," said a Yorkshire captain. "We've got the Crucifix. And meanwhile our guns are giving us the devil."

4

Our gunners did not know that Crucifix Trench was taken. Some of our shells were dropping very close.

"It's time for a red light," said the Yorkshire captain. He had a bullet in his ribs, and was suffering terribly, but he still commanded his men.

A red rocket went up, high through the smoke over all this corner of the battlefield. Somewhere it was seen by watchful eyes, in some O.P. or by some flying fellow. Our guns lifted. The shells went forward, crashing into Shelter Wood beyond.

"Good old gunners!" said a sergeant. "By God, they're playing the game to-day!"

But other men had seen the red rocket above Crucifix Trench. It stood in the sky like a red eye looking down upon the battlefield. The German gunners knew that the British were in Crucifix Trench. They lowered their guns a point or two, shortening their range, and German shells came crumping the earth, on either side, registering the ground.

"And where do we go next, captain?" asked a Yorkshire boy. It seemed he felt restless where he was.

The captain thought Shelter Wood might be a good place to see. He chose ten men to see it with him, and they were very willing.

With the bullet in his ribs—it hurt him horribly—he climbed out of Crucifix Trench, and crawled forward with his ten men to the wood beyond.

It was full of Germans. At the south-west corner of it was a redoubt, with machine-guns and a bomb-store. The German bombers were already flinging their grenades across to the Crucifix.

The wounded captain said that ten men were not enough to take Shelter Wood—it would need a thousand men, perhaps, so he crawled back with the others.

They stayed all night in Crucifix Trench, and it was a dreadful night. At ten o'clock the enemy opened an intense bombardment of heavies and shrapnel, and maintained it at full pitch until two o'clock next morning.

There were 900 men up there and in the neighbourhood. When morning came there were not so many, but the others were eager to get out and get on.

The Yorkshire spirit was unbeaten. The grit of the North Country was still there in the morning after the first assault.

5

Queer adventures overtook men who played a lone hand in this darkness and confusion of battle. One man I met to-day—true Yorkshire, with steel in his eyes and a burr in his speech; it was strange to hear the Saxon words he used—rushed with some of his friends into Birch Tree Wood, which was not captured until two days later.

There were many Germans there, but not visible. Suddenly the Yorkshire lad found himself quite alone, his comrades having escaped from a death-trap, for the wood was being shelled—as I saw myself that day—with an intense fire from our guns.

The lonely boy, who was a machine-gunner without his gun, thought that things were "pretty thick," as, indeed, they were, but he decided that the risks of death were less if he stayed still than if he moved.

Presently, as he crouched low, he saw a German coming. He was crawling along on his hands and knees, and blood was oozing from him. As he crawled, a young Yorkshire soldier, also badly wounded, passed him at a little distance in the wood.

The German stared at him. Then he raised himself, though still on his knees, and fired at the boy with his revolver, so that he fell dead. The German went on his hands again to go on with his crawling, but another shot ripped through the trees, and he crawled no more.

It was fired by the man who had been left alone—the young man I saw to-day. "I killed the brute," he said, "and I'm glad of it."

Our shells were bursting very fiercely over the wood, slashing off branches and ploughing up the earth. The lonely boy searched about for a dug-out and found one. When he went down into it he saw three dead Germans there, and he sat with them for more than eight hours while our bombardment lasted. There was another lad I met who was also a machine-gunner, and alone in the battle zone. He was alone when fourteen of his comrades had been knocked out. But single-handed he carried and served his gun, from one place to another, all through the day, and part of next day, sniping odd parties of Germans with bursts of bullets.

Another sturdy fellow I met came face to face with a German, who called out to him in perfect English:

"Don't shoot. I was brought up in England and played footer for Bradford City. . . . By Jove! I know your face, old man. Weren't you at the Victoria Hotel, Sheffield?"

It was a queer meeting on a battlefield. One of the grimmest things I have heard was told me by another Yorkshire boy. A German surrendered, and then suddenly, as this lad

approached to make him prisoner, pulled the detonator of a bomb and raised it to throw.

" I put my bayonet right close to him so suddenly that he was terrified, and forgot to fling his bomb. Then a queer kind of look came into his eyes. He remembered that the blooming bomb was going off. It went off, and blew him to bits."

That is war. And the men who have told me these things are young men who do not like the things they have seen. But, because it is war, they go through to the last goal with a courage that does not quail.

The men of this division next day took Shelter Wood and Fricourt, and captured many prisoners.

VIII

HOW THE PRUSSIANS FELL AT CONTALMAISON

1

JULY 8

AFTER the first four days of battle there was something like a lull of twenty-four hours—a lull filled with the great noise of guns—which was broken by fresh assaults made by our troops in the direction of Mametz Wood and Contalmaison. For two days now—on Thursday and Friday—there has been severe fighting in that territory, and although we lost Contalmaison last night after taking it in the morning, it is, I am sure, only a temporary set-back, for our position is strong in its neighbourhood, and great loss has been inflicted upon the enemy. The battle of Contalmaison, not yet finished, will be a distinct and important episode in the history of this campaign.

I was able to see something of the battle—all the fierce picture of our shell-fire—but, at the time, with no accurate idea of what was really happening beyond our guns, and with that sense of confusion and mystery which all soldiers have when they are on the battlefield, knowing very little of what is going on to the left or right of them, not knowing what is happening to themselves, or why they stand where they do, or what order will next come to them, or whether our men are doing well or badly.

2

It was early in the morning that I went out beyond many of our batteries and watched the bombardment that was to precede the infantry attacks upon the enemy's positions in front of Contalmaison and, to the right, on Mametz Wood, where some of our men held the south-west corner. There were

large bodies of troops about on high ground where our old trenches are, and bunched about in groups beyond, up a slope leading to the line from which our attack was to be made. They seemed to have nothing in the world to do except hang about in a casual way. Many of them were lying on the grass, or along roadsides, asleep. Not all the roar of the guns made them turn uneasily. They had been there all night, waiting to go up in support, and now, dog-tired, they were taking their chance of rest.

It was not quite a safe spot for sleep. Although the enemy's guns were busy on different places, there was no knowing whether they might not shift a point or two this way at any moment. The roadway had already tempted some of their shells earlier in the morning. Tall beech-trees here and there had been cut clean in half, and a litter of branches and foliage lay below the broken stumps. There were new shell-craters in the field over the way, just where a company of R.A.M.C. men had sat down on their stretchers, waiting for work. But nobody seemed to worry.

A captain of Pioneers spoke to me and said, "Any news?"

He was a middle-sized, keen-looking man, with a humorous look in his grey eyes, which were shaded by a steel helmet, khaki covered. He was as muddy as a scarecrow, and shivered a little after his night in the rain.

"Dashed if I know what's happening," he said; "one never does. Our fellows are supposed to be going up, but no orders come along. There's our adjutant, waiting for 'em." I looked across the road and saw the adjutant. He was lying on his back, quite straight, at full length, with his head on his pack and his waterproof coat over him. He was profoundly asleep.

The Pioneer captain pointed towards little masses of men below the crest of the rising ground, beyond which were hell-fires.

"I thought they would go up an hour ago, but they're still waiting, poor lads. I expect they'll go in it all right in less than half an hour."

He stared towards Mametz village. It was under a pall of greenish smoke, and not a minute passed without a big German shell bursting over it and raising black columns of cloud.

"Nasty kind of place," said the Pioneer. "Thought I should have to spend the night there. Glad I didn't, though!

And such a night! I never saw anything like it. Exactly like hell, only worse; a sky full of shells, and lights bursting like blazes. A regular Brock's Benefit. . . . Hallo, some of 'em are going up."

The men who were in small bunches on the low ground were getting into a new kind of order. They were moving up towards the crest in extended formation. . . .

A German shell was coming our way. I heard its high gobbling note, and shifted my steel hat a little, and hoped it might serve. There was a nasty crash fifty yards away below the road, where some of the men were bunched. . . . A whistle sounded, and the R.A.M.C. men, who had been squatting on their stretchers, sprang up and ran, carrying their stretchers, down a side track. They had found some work to do.

Two other shells came closer, and we changed our position a little. It was getting rather hot.

3

But not so hot as other places, compared with which our ground was Paradise. Mametz village, behind our lines now, was being shelled heavily by the enemy, and was a very ugly spot, but even that was a health resort, as soldiers say, compared with any of the German positions in the neighbourhood of Contalmaison. Our guns were concentrating their fire along a line north of Birch Tree Wood from Horseshoe Trench, now in our hands, across to Peak Wood and Quadrangle Trench away to Mametz Wood on the right. We were also putting a terrific barrage round the village of Contalmaison and Acid Drop Copse. Our batteries, heavy and light, seemed to be in rings round this storm-centre.

The heavies were away behind, and I could only know their existence by the great shells that came rushing overhead, from invisible places at long range, with a long drone like some great harp plucked by old god Thor, as each shell crossed the valley and smashed over the enemy's lines. They came in great numbers and from half the points of the compass, to fall upon that one stretch of ground a mile or so broad. Our field-guns were not invisible.

I could see them winking and blinking in the valleys and up the slopes as far as the eye could range. They fired salvos or

rounds with sharp and separated rat-tat-tats. Every kind of gun and howitzer—old "Grandmothers," the long six-inchers, four-point-sevens, French soixante-quinze, and our own eighteen-pounders—played the devil over the German lines.

I think it was about eleven that they lifted and put a dense barrage of shells farther back. For the first time in my experience this moment was perceptible. It was a kind of hush for just a second, as though all the guns were taking breath. Then the tumult began again, while the infantry went forward into and through the smoke. A little while later I saw rockets high above the smoke in the direction of Contalmaison. Something told me, though without any certainty, that our men were in that village.

From a visual point of view that is all I can tell, but to-day I have seen some of the officers who were directing this battle, and what happened is now much clearer, though not absolutely clear in all its details. The day before yesterday, after heavy fighting in the early stages of the battle, some of our battalions took possession of the Horseshoe Trench to the north-west of Birch Tree Wood and to the south-west of Contalmaison. Other battalions to the right were stretching along a line through Birch Tree Wood to the south of Mametz Wood. A curious affair was happening in a trench called the Old Jaeger Trench, running out of the Horseshoe towards a German redoubt to the west of Peak Wood.

Part of this trench was held by the troops on the left and part by the troops on the right, and both reported and believed that they held all of it. The truth was that a gap in the middle was still held by a party of Germans, who had machine-guns and bombs with which, presently, they made themselves unpleasant. Orders were sent to clear the trench of these ugly customers, and it was done by the troops on the left. Then orders were given to clear forward to a triangle trench to the right of the Old Jaeger. It was a strong redoubt, and the Germans defended themselves so tenaciously at this point that it changed hands three times before our men held it for good.

It yielded finally when the troops on the right fought their way up to Peak Wood, captured it, and enfiladed the enemy with machine-gun fire. At that moment they saw their position

was hopeless, and came running out with their hands up. Farther on there was a machine-gun emplacement which was giving us a good deal of trouble, but this was bombarded and rushed, and on the evening of July 6 the machine-gun, to use the words of one of the officers, was "done in."

Yesterday morning the attack following the bombardment extended from these points south-west of Contalmaison away to the right. Unfortunately, although the fortune of war favoured us in another way, the troops on the right were unable to make much headway. But at this time an extraordinary, and, for the enemy, a terrible, thing happened. Some battalions of the Prussian Guard Reserve, hurriedly brought up a day or two ago from Valenciennes, and thrown into this battlefield without maps or guidance or local knowledge, advanced to meet our men on the right, and walked up, by an awful stroke of chance, straight into the terrific barrage which our guns had just started round Contalmaison. A whole battalion was cut to pieces.

Many others suffered frightful things. I am told by some of the prisoners that they lost three-quarters of their number in casualties, and although this may be an exaggeration—prisoners always have the tendency to exaggerate their losses—it is certain that a mass of men were killed and wounded. As soon as our barrage lifted our troops on the right, most of them men of Yorkshire and northern counties, swept forward and without great trouble entered Contalmaison and Bailiff Wood to the north-west. It was their lights which I had seen signalling through the smoke.

It was a magnificent success, not too dearly bought. But just when our position looked full of promise for the morrow disappointing news came in last night. It is here that the details of what happened are not clear. Germans were reported to be streaming out of Mametz Wood towards Contalmaison, apparently to make a counter-attack there. The enemy's guns were shelling the place. Rain fell heavily, and our men who had fought so well and so long were exhausted.

Owing to the difficulty of communication and other troubles which happen at those times, the situation became confused, and late in the evening it was reported that Contalmaison had been evacuated as a temporary measure for defensive reasons.

At the same time it was also reported that Mametz Wood had

been so heavily shelled by our guns that much damage had been inflicted upon the Germans inside, some of whom had escaped to our lines. We are now holding the outskirts of Contalmaison, in, or in the neighbourhood of, the cemetery, and, I believe, Acid Drop Copse, so that we are in a sound position for further attack.

5

A large number of prisoners were taken, and they came straggling back over the battlefield in miserable little groups. Some of them carried our wounded on stretchers or on their backs, and our men carried their wounded.

They were the remnants of the 3rd Prussian Guard Division, which has been so utterly broken that it no longer exists as a fighting unit. Those who did not fall into our hands have been withdrawn from the line. The "moral" of the men as well as their fighting force has been smashed. Even the officers admit that they have no more stomach for the fight, and several of the men with whom I spoke to-day were frank in saying that they are glad to be prisoners to be safe at last from the frightfulness of this war.

Some of them told me that after leaving Valenciennes a few days ago, after our attack had started, they were brought to Cambrai, and while the officers were sent on by motor-car they marched a long distance through unknown country to the front. They do not know the names of the villages through which they passed, their officers had no maps, and they had an ominous feeling that they were going to their doom. But the strength of our artillery and its deadly accuracy of aim surprised them.

They did not know the English had such gunners. Still more were they surprised by the dash of our infantry when they heard that they had against them "men of the 'New Army.'" "We thought they were Guards," said these Prussian prisoners, who belonged chiefly to the Lehr, Grenadiers, and Fusiliers—all Guards Divisions—the 70th Jaeger and the 110th, 114th, and 190th regiments of the line. Some of them I spoke to were Poles from Silesia—"Ich kann nur ein wenig Deutsch sprechen". (I can only speak a little German), said one of them. Yet they were tall, hefty men of good physique and well fed. Some of them were middle-aged fellows and fathers of families,

corresponding to the French Territorials. They spoke of their wives and children, and their tired, dazed eyes (for they were just down from the field of fire) lighted up at the thought of going home again after the war.

"God send a quick ending to the war!" said one of them, and he spoke the words as a prayer with his hands upraised.

I sat in a little dug-out, bomb-proof, perhaps, but not sound-proof, because the noise of guns was appallingly close and loud, while some of the men were being brought in to be examined by a bright-eyed officer, who spoke their dialects as well as their language, and had an easy way with him so that they were not frightened.

They answered frankly, in a manly way, and were grateful for our treatment of them. A queer scene inside these walls of sandbags, lighted by German candles, filled with all sorts of litter from German pockets—great clasp-knives, leaden spoons, cartridge-clips, compasses, watches, pencils. One of the investigating officers was the son of a famous musician, and seemed to find an intense interest in his job, though new batches of prisoners keep arriving through day and night, so that his meals and his sleep are interrupted.

But with his brother officers he is accumulating a store of information, and sees all the drama of the war, and all its misery for the enemy, between these sandbags, and in the dim candlelight which flickers upon the worn faces of German soldiers taken an hour before up there where the shells are falling.

IX

A CAMEO OF WAR

1

JULY 9

SLOWLY, but quite steadily, we are drawing our lines closer about the enemy's strong places along the whole extent of our attacking front in order that one by one he must abandon them. Last night our troops captured new trenches about Ovillers-La Boisselle, so that the pressure upon that place is tighter, and during the past eighteen hours we have established ourselves in the Bois des Trônes and its neighbourhood to the east of Montauban.

The meaning of our attacking methods and of the hard fighting at different points may not be clear to people who do not realize the position which our men have to storm. It has often been said that the enemy's lines, which stretch from the sea to the Vosges, are one great fortress, and this is true, but it is more essentially and even technically true of the line through which we broke on the first day of July.

The great German salient which curves round from Gommecourt to Fricourt is like a chain of mediæval fortresses connected by earthworks and tunnels. The fortresses, or strong places as we now call them, are the ruined villages—stronger in defence than any old tower because they are filled with machine-guns, trench-mortars, and other deadly engines—of Gommecourt, Beaumont-Hamel, Thiépval, Ovillers, La Boisselle, and Fricourt.

In spite of the superb courage of those British battalions which flung themselves against those strongholds on the left side of the German salient they did not fall, but breaches were made in their defences which are now being widened and deepened. On the southern side, where the attack succeeded, La Boisselle and Fricourt, and farther eastwards Mametz and

Montauban, are ours, and the attack is pushing farther in to turn the strong places on the left from within the fortress walls, as it were, while they are being weakened by assaults from without, gradually putting the strangle-grip upon them. If we have luck and keep striking deeper into the salient, as we have done during the past twenty-four hours at Contalmaison and Ovillers, it would seem to me as if the strong places on the left must either be evacuated by the enemy or surrounded and taken, with their imprisoned troops, by us.

I saw the scene of this struggle for the enemy's strongholds to-day almost as if I were looking into the mirror of the Lady of Shalott. It seemed like that, strangely unreal, as though in an image—and yet terribly real and vivid—because I came upon it suddenly, by accident, arranged for me by a gap in a hedge and by two trees on each side of the gap, like the frame of a picture.

I had been up to the lines in search of an officer whose headquarters is in dug-outs below the crest of a hill. Beyond this crest and another one beyond that the fires of hate were burning all right. I could tell that by the smoke-clouds which came black, and white, and green into the fleecy sky of this July day in France, and by the noise of the guns all about me. But I did not trouble to climb to the crest. There were interesting things to see below and fine men whom I wanted to meet again before they go nearer to those fires.

I passed two friends on the roadway riding in the centre of a long column of troops, and when I waved my hands to them and shouted " Good luck ! " they turned in their saddles and waved back and smiled in a way that one remembers through a lifetime. I did not trouble to climb the crest because there were some captured German guns below it worth seeing as the first-fruits of victory.

They were being fastened to our own gun-carriages and taken off to the place where such trophies go, cheered by French townsfolk on the way. Queer, beastly things were some of these captured engines. There were long wooden barrels hooped with steel, and with a touch-hole to fire the charge for a " plum-pudding " bomb large enough to blow up ten yards of trench—as primitive as the engines of war used in the fifteenth century.

It was on the way back that I came upon the gap in the

hedge. I passed camps of men and horses, masses of guns and long lines of dug-outs in chalk banks, where soldiers sat in the entries on this Sunday afternoon, smoking their pipes with an air of profound peace in spite of the noise of shell-fire; and large bodies of splendid troops, English and Scottish, tramping up the roads, all powdered with white dust, or lying under the shadows of wayside trees, sleeping on their backs with the sun full on their bronzed, sweat-begrimed faces. It was the madding crowd of war, with a tangle of traffic on the roads, and kicking mules making beasts of themselves at the sight of a motor-car, and artillery wagons with creaking axles plunging through it all under the daring guidance of red-faced boys with short whips.

Turning off the road, away from all this turmoil, and presently, through the gap in the hedge, I saw, quite unexpectedly, the scene of war across the fields in front of me, all gold with that weed which is ruining so many harvest fields of France. It was Mametz Wood. I knew at once the queer shape of it with a great bite out of its western side. In spite of all our shell-fire it is still thick with foliage, upon which the sunlight lay, casting a great black shadow underneath. Just below it was Peak Wood, a row of broken trees by a sunken road, and a triangle trench, for which our men fought desperately, so that it changed hands three times before they won it finally, on Friday afternoon.

To the left of Mametz Wood and on a line with it was Contalmaison, and on the left of that Bailiff Wood, which we captured and lost again the day before yesterday, and then farther left Ovillers-La Boisselle, and completing the crescent, La Boiselle itself.

2

Between the gap in the hedge I saw again one of the world's great battlefields, and every detail of it was so clearly and sharply defined in the sunlight that it was like a Pre-Raphaelite picture painted in vivid colours. I could count the shell-holes in the roofs of Contalmaison village, and the château there, standing to the right of a little wood, was brought so closely forward by a stereoscopic effect that I could look into the blackness of its broken windows.

Down below me were our trenches, and I saw our men in them. Some of them were outside the trenches, strolling about

in the open, in little groups, or walking about on a lone track, as though taking a quiet half-hour on this Sunday afternoon.

And yet they were in the centre of the battlefield, and over their heads came an incessant flight of shells, our shells, which I could see falling in the German lines, and in the fields about them German shells, bursting with dull crashes and with clouds of black and greenish smoke. All the power of destruction was at work, but because of the utter calm and beauty of the sky and the golden light over all the scene it seemed to me, standing on the edge of it, less deadly, like a dream of war.

It was no dream. Three of our shells followed each other in a group and burst with one explosion against the left-hand tower of Contalmaison château, smashing off a turret as though it were a card-castle.

Our shells were flinging up fountains of black earth and smoke in the German lines beyond—at Pozières. All round the battlefield there were the black clouds of shell-fire breaking and rising and spreading over Bailiff Wood, at Ovillers, and between the broken tree-trunks of La Boisselle. Men were being killed as usual, over there. But our shells were doing most of the damage.

An extraordinary thing happened as I looked across the château of Contalmaison. The earth seemed suddenly to open in the enemy's lines and let forth the smoke of its inner fires. It gushed out in great round, dense masses, and rose to a vast height, spreading like the foliage of some gigantic tree. It was not a mine.

The explosion from a mine flings up a black mass with jagged edges like a piece of black cardboard cut into teeth. But this was a regular uprising of curly black clouds of great volume, getting denser, and coming continuously. I watched it for twenty minutes or more, and could not make out its meaning, but guessed that we had blown up an ammunition store.

Two great explosions which came quite a few seconds after the first vomit of smoke suggested this. So I went away from the picture through the gap in the trees. Down in the valley where I passed the enemy's shells were coming rather near. A heavy crump burst on a knoll close by, and some officers and men were watching with that curious smile men have at times when they know their lives depend upon a freak of chance. It is an ironical smile, and rather grim.

X

THE ASSAULT ON CONTALMAISON

I

JULY 9

I HAD an idea that there would be "something doing" to-day at Contalmaison, and I went over the fields towards it, past some of our batteries, past columns of troops marching with their bands along the roads which powder them with white blinding dust, past great camps and ammunition columns, and litters of empty shell-cases remaining over from the great bombardment, and past bodies of soldiers stretched out upon the grass and sleeping in the warm sunlight close behind the fighting-lines, until I came to a little crest looking down to Contalmaison village and the woods about it.

Mametz Wood was very quiet this afternoon. As neither side could see exactly the position of its troops underneath the heavy foliage—our men, who were fighting last night, hold a line about half-way through—the gunners were chary of shelling it severely. Now and again a burst of shrapnel smoke puffed against the dark background of the trees, and the shell slashed through the branches, but that was not often, and the wood seemed very peaceful. Looking at it one's imagination found it difficult to realize that perhaps there were men there who had dug themselves into the earth beneath the spreading roots, and that British and German patrols were feeling their way, perhaps, from one tree to another, through the glades, until they came into touch and exchanged some rifle shots before falling back to their own line. I could only guess at that, and could see nothing but the tight foliage, yellow in the sun and black in the shadows.

There were plenty of shells falling elsewhere, and it seemed to me that the enemy had brought up new batteries to strengthen

his defence. His shell-fire was certainly more intense and wider-spreading than during the past few days round here. He was bombarding our positions from La Boisselle to Montauban very fiercely. The poor broken wood of La Boisselle, which our men captured after desperate fighting, was being searched by his black shrapnel, and every now and then by one of his "universals," which broke with a vivid cloud of greenish fumes, very prolonged in density, and forming fantastic shapes as it dissolved. One such cloud, metallic in the brilliance of its green, was like a winged woman with a Medusa face.

High explosives were falling into Montauban village, raising volumes of rose-coloured clouds, beautiful in the sunlight. I think it must have been the dust of red bricks flung up from ruined houses.

2

At half-past three in the afternoon the enemy put a very heavy barrage in a straight line below Contalmaison. One by one the shells burst, and so quickly down the line and back again that they formed a wall of black smoke with only a few gaps.

"It is so nice to get a little fresh air!" said a young gunner officer who was next to me, reporting for his battery, which speaks from afar with a very gruff voice. "During the first few days of the 'show' I lived indoors"—he pointed to the dark entry of a dug-out—"but now I'm getting sunburnt again. The men enjoy this open fighting. Look at 'em!"

There were men moving about the battlefield utterly regardless of the trenches—the old German trenches, marked by billows of brown earth (brown because of our gun-fire, which ploughed it up), and more regular lines of white earthworks, which were our own parapets before the advance. A long column of them was winding very slowly round towards Contalmaison.

"Looks as if they were going up to support an attack," said an officer close to me.

Other groups of khaki-coloured men were moving over the ground which one sees southward from the tall chimney of Pozières village, which we were bombarding heavily.

I thought back to the Ypres salient for a moment. Men do not move about so freely there! Or between Loos and Hulluch, where over the wide barren stretch of desolation no human

being is ever seen, or, if seen, killed. But—" It is nice to get a little fresh air " after the imprisonment in the trenches, and this open warfare is enormously better. It is better even to die in the open, with the wind upon one's face, standing among the poppies, underneath the blue sky, which to-day was glorious with white snow-mountains piled high with dazzling peaks in its sea of blue and sunlight.

And so our men are touched with a kind of spiritual joy to be fighting above-ground again instead of crouching in ditches—though personally I like a handy hole at times.

In the very centre of the battlefield, for which some of our men fought and died a day or two ago, one tall fellow was signalling to somebody about something. Now and then a German shell fell dangerously close to his position, sending up a fountain of earth and smoke, but he kept talking with his dot-and-dash to a far and invisible friend. It seemed an interesting monologue, as though he had important things to tell. It seemed to be addressed to the ruins of Contalmaison. There were moments when its old French château, set in a little wood, was lit up by a splash of golden light as the white clouds drifted by, so that I could almost count its bricks, and could see how the shells which I watched yesterday had opened its roofs. But the left-hand tower was knocked off this morning by a direct hit from that same battery whose fire was being observed by the young gunner officer with whom I sat to-day. It is a wonder the shell did not smash the whole château to a pitiful ruin, but it took the tower " en passant " as chess-players say.

At four o'clock our guns concentrated upon Contalmaison, Acid Drop Copse—the poor little straggly wood to the right of Mametz—and the German trenches defending the Contalmaison ridge. Smoke belched over the battlefield, and the song of the shells was loud and high. It was under those shells falling beyond them and through the smoke that a body of our men moved forward to the assault upon the village.

3

JULY 10.

The village of Contalmaison is ours again. Whether we ever held it before, by more than handfuls of men who went in and went out, is doubtful. Certainly some men succeeded in getting

there from Caterpillar Wood and Acid Drop Copse, because I met them afterwards with wounds in their bodies, but it is difficult to know what happened.

One can only guess that Germans came up from their dug-outs after our men had penetrated the outskirts and made use of the darkness with their machine-guns and bombs.

What happened last night is clear enough. I have already described in a previous dispatch how we concentrated our fire upon the positions in front of the village and then shelled the village itself with terrific intensity.

I saw the beginning of this bombardment, and watched our men going up to support the attack which was to follow. It was begun when fresh troops who had been brought up to help the tired men who had been fighting in this part of the line under heavy shell-fire for several days advanced under the cover of our guns to the left and right of the village.

It was already hemmed in on both sides, for other British troops were in firm possession of Bailiff Wood to the left, and during the evening, by a series of bombing attacks, Mametz Wood to the right had been almost cleared of Germans, who are now only in the outer fringe of it.

The enemy in Contalmaison knew that their position was hopeless. When our guns lifted they heard the cheers of our infantry on both sides of the village, and many of them—at least many of those who were still alive and unwounded—streamed out of the village in disorderly retreat, only to be caught behind by our extended barrages between Contalmaison, Pozières, and Bazentin-le-Petit.

Our men were quickly into the village, and having learnt a lesson by the experience of other troops at other places made a thorough search of machine-gun emplacements and dug-outs, so that there should be no further trouble with this wasps' nest.

4

The men left in Contalmaison were in a dreadful state, having suffered to the very limit of human endurance, and beyond. They were surprised to find themselves living enough to be taken prisoners.

One of these men, with whom I talked this morning, told me a tragic tale. He spoke a little English, having been a cabinet-

maker in the Tottenham Court Road some years ago before he went back to Würtemberg, where, when the war began, he was, as he said, taken and put in a uniform and told to fight, though it was not his trade, poor devil.

With other men of the 122nd (Bavarian) Regiment he went into Contalmaison five days ago. Soon the rations they had brought with them were finished, and owing to our ceaseless gunfire it was impossible to get fresh supplies. They suffered great agonies of thirst, and the numbers of their dead and wounded increased steadily.

"There was a hole in the ground," said this German cabinet-maker, whose head was bound with a bloody bandage and who was dazed and troubled when I talked with him. "It was a dark hole which held twenty men, all lying in a heap together, and that was the only dug-out for my company, so that there was not room for more than a few.

"It was necessary to take turns in this shelter, while outside the English shells were coming and bursting everywhere. Two or three men were dragged out to make room for two or three others:

"Then those who went outside were killed or wounded. Some of them had their heads blown off, and some of them had both legs torn off, and some of them their arms.

"But we went on taking turns in the hole, although those who went outside knew that it was their turn to die very likely. At last most of those who came into the hole were wounded, some of them badly, so that we lay in blood.

"There was only one doctor there, an 'unteroffizier' "—he pointed to a man who lay asleep on the ground, face downwards—"and he bandaged some of us till he had no more bandages.

"Then, last night, we knew the end was coming. Your guns began to fire all together—the dreadful 'trommel-feuer,' as we call it—and the shells burst and smashed up the earth about us.

"We stayed down in the hole waiting for the end. Then we heard your soldiers shouting. Presently two of them came down into our hole. They were two boys and they had their pockets full of bombs.

"They had bombs in their hands also, and they seemed to wonder whether they would kill us. But we were all wounded,

nearly all, and we cried 'Kameraden!' . . . And now we are prisoners—and I am thirsty."

Other prisoners told me that the effect of our fire was terrible in Contalmaison, and that at least half of their men holding it were killed or wounded, so that when our soldiers entered last night they walked over the bodies of the dead.

These men who had escaped were in a pitiful condition. They lay on the ground utterly exhausted most of them, and—that was strange—with their faces to the earth. Perhaps it was to blot out the vision of things seen.

I shall remember the cabinet-maker of the Tottenham Court Road. In spite of the clay which caked his face and clothes and the bloody rag round his head he was a handsome bearded fellow with blue eyes, which once or twice lighted up with a tragic smile, as when I asked him when he thought the war would end.

"In 1915," he said, "when I was wounded at Ypres, I thought the war would end in a few months. And a little while ago I thought so again!"

Then he muttered something to himself, but loudly enough for me to hear the words—"Surely we cannot go on much longer?"

I left these men, and farther down the road saw many more prisoners. There were nearly three hundred of them marching down a side track, between some ripening corn, under mounted escort, their grey-blue uniforms hardly visible until I was closer to them against the background of the wheat.

Most of them were young, healthy-looking men, who walked briskly, and it was only a few behind who limped as they walked; and looked broken and beaten men.

5

It was a good day for us in prisoners, for about 500 have come down from Contalmaison, Mametz Wood, and the Trônes Wood as living proofs of our advance in all those places.

All the prisoners speak of the terror of our artillery-fire, and documents captured in their dug-outs tell the same tale in words which reveal the full horror of bombardment.

"We are quite shut off from the rest of the world," wrote a German soldier on the day before our great attack. "Nothing

comes to us; no letters. The English keep such a barrage on our approaches, it is terrible. To-morrow morning it will be seven days since this bombardment began; we cannot hold out much longer. Everything is shot to pieces."

"Our thirst is terrible," wrote another man. "We hunt for water and drink it out of shell-holes."

Many of the men speak of the torture of thirst which they suffered during our bombardment.

"Every one of us in these five days has become years older. We hardly know ourselves. Bechtel said that, in these five days, he lost 10 lb. Hunger and thirst have also contributed their share to that. Hunger would be easily borne, but the thirst makes one almost mad.

"Luckily it rained yesterday, and the water in the shell-holes, mixed with the yellow shell-sulphur, tasted as good as a bottle of beer. To-day we got something to eat. It was impossible before to bring food up into the front line under the violent curtain-fire of the enemy."

One other out of hundreds tells all in a few words:

"We came into the front line ten days ago. During those ten days I have suffered more than any time during the last two years. The dug-outs are damaged in places, and the trenches are completely destroyed."

We do not gloat over the sufferings of our enemy, though we must make them suffer, and go on suffering, that they may yield. It is the curse of war, the black horror which not even the heights of human courage may redeem, nor all the splendour of youth eager for self-sacrifice.

I have seen things to-day before which one's soul swoons, and which, God willing, my pen shall write, so that men shall remember the meaning of war.

But now, when these things are inevitable, we must look only to our progress towards the end, and to-day we have made good progress.

Yesterday I wrote of the position we attacked on July 1 as a great German fortress with a chain of strongholds linked by underground works.

In ten days, by the wonderful gallantry of our men and the great power of our guns, we have smashed several of those forts—as strong as any on the Western front, and defended stubbornly by masses of guns and troops—and have stormed our way in so

deeply that the enemy is now forced to fall back upon his next line of defence.

The cost has been great, but the enemy's losses and the present position in which he finds himself prove the success of our main attack.

For the first time since the beginning of the war the initiative has passed to us, and the German Headquarters Staff is hard pushed for reserves.

XI

THE BATTLE OF THE WOODS

1

JULY 12

FOR several days now I have been giving a chronicle of hard fighting at several important points on the way to the second German line, with such scenes as one eye-witness may describe in a great battle in which many different bodies of troops are engaged upon a wide front.

The fortunes of war have varied from day to day, almost from hour to hour, so that positions taken one evening have been lost in the morning and again captured by the afternoon. Writing as events are happening, one's narrative becomes as confused as the confusion of the battlefield itself, where troops know nothing, or very little, of what is doing to their right and left, until some general scheme of operations is completed.

By the capture of Contalmaison and ground to each side of it a general scheme of progress has been achieved, and, although fighting does not cease about these points, it is now possible to give a clearer idea of the battle as it has developed up to the present moment.

I think it may very well be called the Battle of the Woods, for the chief characteristic of it has been the determined effort of our troops to take and hold a number of copses and small forests between the first and second German lines.

On the left of Contalmaison is Bailiff Wood, north-eastwards of the Horseshoe Redoubt. If we could get that and keep it Contalmaison itself could be enfiladed and attacked from the west as well as from the south. Away to the right of Contalmaison is Mametz Wood, even more important both in size and position, with Bernafay Wood still farther eastwards and Trônes Wood on the right again. Other small woods or

copses to the south of Contalmaison were strong fighting points, from Shelter Wood to Round Wood and Birch Wood at the top of the Sunken Road and Peak Wood to the left of the Quadrangle Trench.

Some of these places are but a few shell-slashed trees serving as landmarks, but Bailiff Wood, Mametz Wood, Bernafay Wood, and Trônes Wood are still dense thickets under heavy foliage hiding the enemy's troops and our own, but giving no protection from shell-fire.

It is for these woodlands on high ground that our men have been fighting with the greatest gallantry and most stubborn endurance, suffering more than light losses, meeting heavy counter-attacks, gaining ground, losing it, retaking it, and thrusting forward again, with a really unconquerable spirit, because they know that these woods are the way to the second bastion of the German stronghold.

It would be good to say something about the different battalions who have been fighting the Battle of the Woods, and it is hard not to give some honour to them now by name. But there are reasons against it—the enemy wants to know their names for other reasons—and we must wait until some weeks have passed. They are men from nearly all our English counties—from Northumberland, Durham, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, from the Midlands, the Home Counties, and the "West Countrie." Welshmen were there, and Irish and Highlanders and Lowlanders. It was a British battle, but the greater share of it fell to England alone, and it was English lads from the North, and English lads from old county towns like Worcester and Northampton, York and Bedford, Guildford and Arundel, Norwich and old London Town itself, who fought on the way to Contalmaison and took this stronghold of the woodlands.

I passed some of them on the roads to-day. They were the men who captured Contalmaison the day before yesterday, and they were marching with such a steady swing that it was hard to think they had been through such fighting and fatigues, and that they had left behind them many good fellows who will never come back along the road.

They were bringing back trophies of victory. On their wagons, beside their own steel hats, were German helmets. Some of the enemy's machine-guns were passing back with

them, and although the men were tired they held their heads high and there was a fine pride in their eyes. An officer who watched them pass called out the names of their regiments and said, "Well done!" and one of their own officers waved his hand and called back, "Cheery-O!" It was the greeting of gallant fighting men.

2

But before the taking of Contalmaison the day before yesterday there were other men who had done their best to take it, and did take it for a while, in spite of bad luck and every kind of hardship.

Their attack depended a good deal upon the progress made by other troops who were fighting for Bailiff Wood on the left, and by troops who were attacking up to the line of Pearl Alley on the right.

Neither of these attempts was successful at the time, and the men who had been ordered to take Contalmaison were not in a happy position. The weather had been foul, and it was this which on July 7 and 8 made all attacks difficult. When the troops of the attacking columns tried to get forward the ground was bogged, their rifles and bombs and machine-guns were covered with muddy slime, and they stumbled through water-logged trenches. Apart from this the way was perilous and tragic.

The main trench leading up to Contalmaison was the Sunken Road which goes up between Round Wood and Birch Wood, and this was being heavily barraged by the enemy's guns sweeping down the valley from Pozières.

Farther up and slanting right to Pearl Alley was a shallow trench.

Dead bodies lay there in the mud, and soon it was choked with wounded men. How could any one pass? How was it possible to bring up bombs and ammunition and machine-guns and all the stores which must follow an attack? That was not done, but our men, fellows who know the chimes of Worcester Cathedral, struggled forward over open ground and made a dash for Contalmaison, enfiladed by machine-gun fire from Bailiff Wood and Mametz Wood, which were not yet in our hands. Round the western side of Contalmaison was a hallow trench in which the enemy also kept his machine-guns,

but when the remnants of the attacking force rushed forward these were withdrawn into the village, from which the German gunners swept the ground.

It seems to me quite an astonishing feat of arms that our men, in such small numbers and in such adverse conditions, should have penetrated a good way into the village. And it is wonderfully to their credit that they should have taken eighty prisoners at such a time.

They found themselves "up in the air," as soldiers say, and they were being badly hurt by machine-gun fire. It was a bad position, and after rummaging through some German dug-outs and taking their prisoners they fell back to a strong point to the south of the village, which they held for two or three days, establishing a machine-gun post which did valuable service in the next attack.

They did not succeed in holding Contalmaison, and in war, which is a hard thing, it is only success that counts. But I see nothing to blame in the adventure of those companies who got through at great hazard. Luck was against them, and against their other battalions. Luck—and the weather.

3

In the meantime great fighting was in progress for the woods around. A very splendid body of men, among them true descendants of Sir Hugh Evans and other brave men across the Marches, had fought their way up on July 5 to Birch Tree Copse and Shelter Alley, to Quadrangle Trench on the 6th, then to Caterpillar Wood and Marlborough Wood, and they had placed, with a cunning that belongs to the genius of war, a machine-gun which covered an exit from Mametz Wood, where the enemy was still in force.

At 3 o'clock on Monday afternoon last our troops advanced to the capture of the wood—a wood whose gloom was brightened by the frightful flash of shells, whose tree-trunks were broken and splintered and slashed by sharp axes hurtling through the leaves, and about whose gnarled roots, in shell-holes and burrows, German soldiers crouched with their bombs and machine-guns. A wood of terror. Yet not dismaying to those men of ours who went into its twilight. Our own guns were shelling it with a progressive barrage.

Our men were to pass forward in short, sharp rushes behind the barrage, but some of them in their eagerness went too fast and too far, and went through the very barrage itself until a signal warned a gunner officer sitting in an O.P. behind, so that he suddenly seized a telephone and whispered some words into it, and made the guns " lift " again.

Waves of bullets were streaming like water through the trees from German machine-guns. Many of our men fell, and the others, checked a while, lay down in any holes they could find or dig. All through the night shells broke over them, and through the glades there came always that horrible chatter of machine-guns.

It was a night to which men think back through a lifetime with a wonderment that it brought any dawn for them. But when dawn came their spirit was unbroken and they made a new attack, and went forward with bombs and bayonets to the encounter of other men not less brave. Not less brave, in truth and in fairness to them. There was a fierce fight before the last of them surrendered, so that Mametz Wood was ours, for a while at least.

4

Meanwhile to the left of Contalmaison—our left—other men had worked their way up into Bailiff Wood and had established posts there. It was still impossible to attack Contalmaison from the south, and, as it happened, perhaps a lucky thing because the enemy had expected an attack from the south and had most of his machine-guns facing that way when our troops advanced upon him from the west.

They advanced after a series of artillery barrages from a great number of batteries working in most perfect harmony with the plan of the infantry attack.

At 4.50 the infantry went forward to their first stage in four waves and in extended order. They had to cover about 1100 yards of open ground, and they travelled light, without their packs, fighting troops, searching parties for house-fighting, and consolidating troops.

" They went across magnificently," said their General, and in spite of the enemy's shells and machine-guns penetrated the town. They worked across in time to the successive barrage which preceded them, and at 7 o'clock they had the whole of

Contalmaison. The enemy defended himself bravely, and there was some fierce hand-to-hand fighting, in which 200 Germans were killed, refusing to surrender. Many prisoners were taken in the dug-outs.

So at last the stronghold of the Woods was ours, and there is good hope that we shall keep it.

One other wood in this stretch of woodlands is still not ours. It is the Wood of Trônes, where also there has been desperate fighting by the men who captured Bernafay Wood and Caterpillar Wood and the ground about Montauban, shelled and shelled again by the enemy, who hates to have us there.

We have taken it several times, but the evening's shell-fire forced us from part of it. When they come, our shell-fire slashes them to death. So much of it is No Man's Land, and a devilish place.

But we hold a great stretch of ground after the Battle of the Woods.

XII

THE FIGHT FOR OVILLERS

1

JULY 13

AT Ovillers there has been fierce fighting to-day, which has gained for us several important bits of trench and ground, linking up with other separate points already won, so that this German stronghold is closely besieged.

The enemy to-day was bombarding our positions round Contalmaison and Mametz Wood with a most formidable barrage, and as I watched this from a vantage-point looking across a wide stretch of the battlefields it seemed to me that the Germans might be preparing a strong counter-attack along that line.

Nearer to Thiépval it was strangely quiet after the great fighting a week and more ago.

The village of Thiépval itself was deadly quiet in the German lines of brown, bombarded earth, beyond our whiter trenches. What was once a wood there, about red-roofed barns and houses and an old church tower, is now only a number of charred stumps sticking up from the brick-dust and ruin of these buildings.

Behind Thiépval, captured and lost by our soldiers after heroic fighting and great sacrifice on July 1, could be seen the places which the enemy is holding in his second line of defence, the next line of village fortresses.

They were marked by the tall chimney of Courcelette, the woods of Grandcourt, and the church spire of Irles. And there, standing high and clear above the ridge, was one landmark which has been famous before in the war and will be again before the war is ended. It was the clock-tower of Bapaume, and if the sun had been shining on it we could have read the time of day.

On the ridge above Thiépval were little moving figures.

"Germans," said a sergeant with one eye to his glass.

There was a lot of them, crawling about like ants, but none of our shells fell among them. All guns were busy on other work farther to the right, where the smoke of great shells rose like smouldering fires over all the ground from Ovillers to Montauban.

2

The fighting for Ovillers has been hard, bloody, and close. Many of our men have died to gain a yard or two of earthwork. There have been great adventures in the capturing of some bits of broken brick or the working round a ditch below the remnants of a wall.

Under a steady drive of machine-gun bullets sweeping all the ground, men of ours from Cheshire and another English county in the north have crept forward at night with a few hand-grenades and flung themselves against the enemy's bombing-posts and barricades and fought fiercely to smash down the sandbags or brickwork and get a few more yards of clear ground.

They have sapped their way underground and blown up the roofs of vaults where Germans lay in hiding with machine-guns. They have fought in small parties, gaining isolated points in the southern part of the village, and holding on to them under heavy fire until only a few men remained alive, still holding on.

There have been fights to the death between a handful of English or Irish soldiers and a dozen or more Germans, meeting each other in the darkness of deep cellars quarried out from the chalk subsoil, and German gunners peering out of slits in concrete emplacements below-ground and firing bursts of bullets down the roadway have found themselves suddenly in the grasp of men covered with white clay rising out of holes in the earth, with no weapons but their picks.

Ovillers is a place of abominable ruin.

"Do you know Neuville-St.-Vaast?" asked an officer this morning, and when I nodded (because I had a near call there) he said, "Ovillers beats it hollow for sheer annihilation."

There is nothing left of it except dust. There is not a wall standing two feet high, or a bit of a wall. The guns have swept it flat.

But underground there are still great cellars quarried out by inhabitants who have long fled, and in these the Germans are holding out against our attacks and our bombardments.

Heavy shells have opened up some of them, and filled them with dead and wounded, but many still stand strong, and out of them come the enemy's machine-guns and bombers to make counter-attacks against the ditches and debris from which our men are working forward. The ground is pitted with enormous shell-holes, in which men lie buried. Ovillers is perhaps more ghastly than any ruined ground along the front.

3

It was at 8 o'clock on the morning of July 7 that the south-eastern part of the village was taken by assault. The North-countrymen advanced from a line to the north of La Boisselle after a great bombardment, and went over open ground to the labyrinth of trenches which defend the village. These had been smashed into a tumult of earth and sandbags, but, as usual, some of the German machine-gunners had been untouched in their dug-outs, and they came up to serve their machines as soon as our barrage lifted.

Other Germans defended themselves with bombs. There was savage fighting between the broken traverses, in shell-craters, and in ditches. Many of our men fell, but others came up and pushed farther forward. One officer and a man or two ran straight towards a German machine-gun which was doing deadly work, and knocked it out with a well-aimed bomb. But higher up on this maze of broken trenches was a German redoubt, from which machine-gun fire came in streams.

Some Irish soldiers tried to storm the place but suffered heavy casualties in front of the redoubt. It was decided to fall back a little and re-form the line for the night, and all through the night the men worked to build up barricades to cut off the enemy from the southern end of the village.

That end was being " cleaned out " of Germans, who were routed out of cellars. Many of them were glad to surrender and grateful for the life they had expected to lose.

" We took bags of 'em," said an officer in charge of this work.

Next day the men worked their way forward above-ground

and below-ground. Some crept out of a ditch and worked up to a bombing-post made by others on the left of the village.

Another body of troops made a sudden forward movement, and taking the enemy by surprise marched round the left and took up a line right across the south-west end of Ovillers without loss. That was a great gain, which enabled our men to link up from separate points. The fighting to-day has been a further process of fitting up this jig-saw puzzle of isolated groups who have been burrowing into the German stronghold.

4

A great adventure, or what the officers call a fine "stunt," was carried out by some Lancashire men on the right of the village. They were told to send out a patrol overland in the direction of Pozières.

I think, to the young officers in charge, it must have seemed rather like a pleasant suggestion to go and discover the North Pole or the Magnetic North. However, the idea appealed to them; they would see some new country, and there was quite a chance of individual fighting, which is so much better than being killed in a ditch by shell-fire.

With them went a young machine-gun officer, who is justly proud of having gone out with sixteen machine-guns and, as you shall hear, of coming back with twenty.

I know that he is pleased with himself, as he ought to be, because he had a laughing light in his eyes when I gave him a lift in a car on the way back to a good dinner, and having escaped without a scratch (and four extra guns) it is no wonder that he thought this adventure "a topping bit of work."

It was gallant work, and as far as the first day went, without loss. The little company of men struck north-eastwards up an old bit of communication-trench, and part of the way in the open, in the twilight and the darkness that followed. They were going steadily into German territory, to the high ground which slopes down from Pozières.

There were lots of Germans about—thousands of them not enormously far away—but they did not expect a visit like this, and were not watchful of this piece of ground.

After working forward for something like a mile they came to a redoubt inhabited by German bombers.

What happened then is not very clear to me, and was certainly not very clear to the Germans. But this place was passed successfully, and it was farther on that my machine-gun friend (the fellow with the sparkle in his eyes) increased his number of guns.

This part of his adventure is also somewhat confused, as most fighting is. He tells me that he "pinched" the guns. Also that he made "a bag of 'em." Anyhow, he captured them, and has brought them back, which is a very good proof that they were taken.

So far all went well. The night was spent in consolidating this extraordinary position right in the heart of German territory, and all next day our men stayed there. They had a wonderful view of the country below them, saw many things worth noting for future use, and sent bursts of machine-gun fire at the enemy's infantry moving down to attack our troops.

But it was too good to last. The enemy became aware that they were being hit from a position where none of our troops could possibly be, according to the logic of things.

They could hardly believe their eyes, I imagine, when they saw these illogical young gentlemen making themselves at home in this extremely advanced post.

There must have been some frightful words used by German officers before they ordered an infantry attack to clear these Englishmen out. The infantry came down a trench from Pozières, but as they came they were met by a stream of machine-gun fire directed by the young officer who had "pinched" four more guns than he had taken out.

They suffered heavy casualties, and the attack broke down. But then the enemy put his guns to work, as he always does when his infantry fails, and what had been a great adventure, with a sporting chance, became a deadly business, with all the odds against our men.

The enemy's shell-fire was concentrated heavily upon this one bit of trench away out in the open, and the ground was ploughed up with high explosives. The machine-guns were taken back, but the British held on until at last only an officer and six men were left.

Those who came back unwounded numbered in the end only one officer and one man—with the exception of a sergeant who stayed behind with a wounded Irishman. He would not leave

his comrade, and for thirty-six hours stayed out in his exposed position, with heavy shells falling on every side of him.

The Irishman was delirious, and making such a noise that his friend knocked him on the head to keep him quiet. Every time a shell burst near him he shouted out, "You've missed me again, Fritz."

But the sergeant himself kept his wits. He is a Lancashire man and with all the dogged pluck of Lancashire.

When the bombardment quietened down he brought back his friend, and then went out to No Man's Land to search for another one.

5

But let us not forget that our men have not the monopoly of courage in this war. We have against us a brave enemy, and again and again during this battle our officers and men have paid a tribute to the stubborn fighting qualities of the German soldiers.

"For goodness' sake," said one officer, "get rid of that strange idea in the minds of many people at home that we are fighting old men and boys and cripples.

"All the Germans we have met and captured have been big, hefty fellows, well fed until our bombardment stopped their food, and with plenty of pluck in them.

"The courage of their machine-gunners especially is—worse luck for us—quite splendid."

As far as food goes the watchword of the German people is "soldiers first."

That they are suffering themselves seems certain from the letters found in great numbers in their captured dug-outs. It seems to me incredible that these should be fictitious.

They bear in every line the imprint of bitter truth, and they read like a cry from starving people.

"You reproach me with writing so little to you. What can I write? If I told the truth about conditions here I should be locked up, and as I do not wish to write lies to you I had better say nothing.

"We have tickets for everything now—flour, meat, sausage, butter, fat, potatoes, sugar, soup, etc. We are really nothing more than tickets ourselves."

And in another letter from Cologne:

"Hunger is making itself felt here. During the week none of the families received any potatoes. The allowance now is one egg per head per week and half a pound of bread and fifty grammes of butter per head per day.

"England is not so wrong about starving us out. If the war lasts three months longer we shall be done. It is a terrible time for Germany. God is punishing us too severely."

There is only one satisfaction in these pitiful letters. It is the hope it gives us that the enemy—not these poor women and children, but the Devil at the back of the business—will realize soon that war does not pay, and will haul down the flag with its skull and cross-bones.

XIII

THROUGH THE GERMAN SECOND LINE

1

JULY 15

FOR a little while—yes, and even now—it has seemed something rather marvellous. We have broken through the enemy's second line; through, and beyond on a front of two and a half miles, and for the first time since October of 1914 cavalry has been in action. Men who fought in the retreat from Mons, the little remnant left, look back on the old days when the enemy's avalanche of men swept down on them and say, as one said to me yesterday, "Through the second line? Then we have broken the evil spell." So it seems to men who fought in the first battle of Ypres, or in the second, and then for a year more stood in their trenches staring through loopholes at the zigzag of German lines, barb-wired, deeply dug, fortified with redoubts, machine-gun emplacements, and strong places—a great system of earthworks on high ground, nearly always on high ground, which made one grow cold to see in aeroplane photographs—supported by masses of guns which had been registered on every road and trench of ours.

To smash through that could be done at a great cost. Given a certain number of guns on a certain length of front, with hardened troops ready for a big dash, and there was no doubt that we could break the enemy's first line, or system, as we broke through at Neuve Chapelle and at Loos. But afterwards? That was the hard thing to solve. No one on the Western front had found the formula to carry the offensive beyond the first line without coming to a dead check at a river of blood. The French troops who broke through in the Champagne fell before they reached the second line. At Loos, Highlanders and Londoners swept through the first line

and then, at Hill 70 and Hulluch, were faced by annihilating fire, and could go no farther except to death. . . . But to-day we broke the second German line.

2

I had the luck to give the news to some of our men who had been wounded early in the battle. It was worth a king's ransom to see their gladness. "Have we got through, sir?" asked an English boy, bandaged about the head and face. When I told him a great light came into his eyes, and he said, "By Jove! . . . That's pretty good!"

A wounded officer raised himself on a stretcher and called out to me as I passed, "Any news? . . . How are we doing up there? . . . What, right through? . . . Oh, splendid!" Because I had come down from the battlefield and might know something, officers and men on the roads asked eager questions. A doctor came out of an operating-theatre in a field-hospital. He was very busy there with men who could not answer questions. He stood for a moment in the doorway of the tent wiping his hands on a towel.

"How's it going? Have we broken through?"

He stared at me when I answered, as though searching for the truth in me, and said, "Sure? . . . I hardly thought we could do it."

The news spread quickly behind the lines, and there has been a queer thrill in the air to-day, exciting men with the promise of victory. I think they, too, feel that an evil spell has been broken because British soldiers have broken the second German line. Their hopes run ahead of the facts.

Their imagination has visions of an immediate German rout, and the enormous patience of the French people, incredulous, after two years, of any quick ending, is not shared by some of our young officers and men, who believe that we have the enemy on the run, not remembering his third line, and fourth, and God knows how many more.

For a day, anyhow, victory has been in the air, and because it was the 14th of July, France's day, there are flags waving everywhere, on wayside cottages and barns and across the streets of an old French town. Women and children are carrying the tricolour, and as our wounded come down in

ambulances and lorries, mostly lightly wounded men straight out of the battle, wearing German helmets on bandaged heads, waving bandaged hands, or staring out gravely, with a pain in their eyes, at the life of the roads which is theirs again, the flags flutter up to them and laughing girls cry, "Merci, camarades!" and old men stand on the roadsides raising their hats to these boys of ours who have won back a mile or two more of the soil of France and have been touched by fire.

All that is part of the emotion which belongs to war, the sentiment and the faith and the hope without which men could not fight nor women hide their tears.

But the business of war itself is different and of a grimmer kind, not admitting sentiment to those Generals of ours who have been calculating chances based upon the position of their guns, the quantity of their ammunition, their reserves of men, the enemy's dispositions, resources, and difficulties, and all the mechanics of a great battle. They have had to study human nature, too, as well as the mechanism of war. To how great a test could they put these battalions of ours in the plan to smash the German second line? How long, for instance, could they "stick it" in Bernafay Wood and the Trônes Wood? Was it possible to put in troops already tired by hard fighting? How could they be replaced by fresh troops? . . . A thousand problems of man-power and gun-power which must be reckoned out, without much margin of error, if all the cost of the first part of the battle—a tragic cost—were to be justified by success in the second part.

Working night and day, snatching a little sleep and a little food at odd hours, in constant touch with telephones whispering messages from headquarters, batteries, battalion commanders in the field, receiving reports of local successes and local failures of German counter-attacks, of German reinforcements in guns and men, our Divisional Generals and Brigadiers, keeping in touch with Corps Generals and Army Generals, had to prepare for the second big blow. It would have to be quick and hard.

3

There had been a whole fortnight's fighting since the great attack was launched on the First of July, and it had been very desperate fighting. On the left from Hébuterne down

to Beaumont-Hamel the heroic self-sacrifice of great numbers of men had not been rewarded by success. That side of the German fortress-lines had remained standing—broken in places, but not carried nor held after the first bloody assaults.

The enemy had concentrated his defensive strength at that part of the line, believing the main attack was to be delivered there, and it was one vast redoubt crammed with machine-guns which scythed down battalions of our men as they advanced with incomparable valour. Farther south the stronghold of Ovillers was not yet taken, though almost surrounded, and penetrated by bodies of grenadiers bombing their way into the quarries and cellars.

It was through the southern bastion of the German fortress position that our troops had stormed their way, and in fourteen days of hard stubborn fighting they had struggled forward up the high ground from the Fricourt Ridge to the Montauban Ridge. In my dispatches I have endeavoured to record the narrative of these daily battles, and to give some faint idea of the wonderful courage and tenacity of our men, who captured Contalmaison and lost it and captured it again under terrible storms of fire, who went forward to the Battle of the Woods, fighting for every yard of the way in Bailiff Wood on the left, and Trônes Wood on the right, and Mametz Wood in the centre, with little copses of naked tree-trunks round about, into which the enemy hurled his high explosives.

Wave after wave of splendid men went up. Not one of these places was won easily. The spirit of our race, all the steel in it, all the fire in its blood, was needed to gain the ground swept by machine-guns and ploughed by shells. There were hours when men of weaker stock would have despaired and yielded. But these men of ours would not be beaten. Fresh waves of them went to get back in the morning what had been lost at night, or at night what had been lost by day because of the fire which had destroyed those who had gone up first. And every day they made a little progress, thrusting forward an advance post here, winning a new bit of wood there, bombing the Germans back from ground we needed for a new advance.

There was not a man among all our men who had any misunderstanding as to the purpose of the struggle. I have spoken to hundreds of them, and all knew that it was " up to them," as they say, to push on to the second German line so

that other men could break it. I know that many of these men, quite simple fellows, felt individually that upon his single courage, his last bit of pushful strength, his last stumble over a yard of earth towards that second German line, depended, as far as one man's strength tells, the success of the great attack. It was this spirit which made them shout "No surrender!" when surrender would have been an easy way of escape, and "stick it" in places of infernal horror. I write the plain unvarnished truth.

It was when Contalmaison—the Stronghold of the Woods—was finally and securely taken, when Mametz Wood and Bailiff Wood were mostly ours, and when our positions were strengthened at Montauban with some footing in Trônes Wood, that the attack upon the second German line became possible. It was for that moment that our Generals were now waiting and preparing. Men were there who had fought long in the Ypres salient, hardened to every phase of trench warfare, and men who had won great honour in the Loos salient, and men, all of them, who had the spirit of attack.

I watched them passing along the roads towards the front, saw old friends in their ranks, and knew, as I looked, that in all the world there are not more splendid soldiers. Hardened by a long campaign, bronzed to the colour of their belts, marching with most perfect discipline, these handsome, clean-cut men went into the battlefield whistling as on the first day of the battle their comrades had gone singing, though they knew that in a few hours it would be hell for them. As I watched them pass something broke in my heart so that I could have wept silly tears. There were other men, harder than I, who were stirred by the same emotion, and cursed the war.

4

The attack was to begin before the dawn. Behind the lines, as I went up to the front in the darkness, the little villages of France were asleep. It was a night of beauty, very warm and calm, with a moon giving a milky light to the world. Clouds trailed across it without obscuring its brightness, and there was only one star visible—a watchful eye up there looking down upon the battlefields.

The whitewashed walls of cottages and barns appeared out

of great gulfs of shadow, and trees on high ground above the fields were cut black against the moonlight. Warm scents of hay and moist earth, and new-baked bread, and the acrid smell of French farmyards came upon the air. Farther forward there was still great quietude along the roads, but here and there long supply columns and ambulance convoys loomed black under the trees.

The ambulances were empty before the battle. For several miles only one figure stood at every cross-road. It was the figure of Christ on a wayside Calvary. Sentries gave their challenge, as on the first night of battle, and presently I saw other soldiers about in the dark entries of French courtyards, their bayonets shining like a streak of light, and officers standing together with whispered consultations, and, along side roads, men marching.

A long column of them came to a halt to let our car pass, and I looked into the men's eyes. There was a young officer there whose face I should know if I saw him again in the world, because it was in the rays of a lantern, and had a white light on it. He had the look of Lancelot.

The men were very quiet. Very quiet also were camps of men and horses in fields dipping down to hollows where a few lanterns twinkled, and presently quiet close to the edge of the battlefields I passed great columns of horse-gunners and horse transport and cavalry with their lances up, and Indian native cavalry, still as statues. The men were drawn up along the side of the road, and their figures were utterly black in the darkness between an old mill-house and some other buildings. Except for one man who was humming a tune, they were quite silent, and they hardly stirred in their saddles. They seemed to be waiting with some grim expectation.

The road was lined with trees which made a tunnel with its foliage, and at one end of the tunnel which showed a patch of sky there were strange lights flashing, like flaming swords cutting through the darkness. We went up towards the lights and towards a monstrous tumult of noise, and walked straight across country towards the centre of a circle of fire which was all round us. Our artillery was smashing the German line.

5

I described, perhaps at too great length, the bombardment on the night before the 1st of July. Then it seemed to me that nothing could be more overwhelming to one's soul and senses. But this was worse—more wonderful and more terrible. As I stumbled over broken ground and shell-holes, and got caught in coils of wire, a cold sweat broke out upon me, and for a little while I was horribly afraid. It was not fear for myself. It was just fear, the fear that an animal may have when the sky is full of lightning—a sensuous terror. The hell of war encircled us, and its waves of sound and light beat upon us.

Our batteries were firing with an intense fury. The flashes of them were away back behind us—where the heavies have their hiding-places—and over all the ground in front of our new line of attack. They came out of the black earth with short, sharp stabs of red flame whose light filled the hollows with pools of fire. And the sky and the ridges of ground and the earthworks and ruins and woods across our lines were blazing with the flashes of bursting shells. Blinding light leapt about like a will-o'-the-wisp. For a second it lit up all the horizon over Contalmaison, and gave a sudden picture, ghastly white, of the broken château with stumps of trees about it. Then it was blotted out by a great blackness, and instantly shifted to Mametz Wood or to Montauban, revealing their shapes intensely and the shells crashing beyond them, until they, too, disappeared with the click of a black shutter. A moment later and Fricourt was filled with white brilliance, so that every bit of its ruin, its hideous rummage of earth, its old mine-craters, and its plague-stricken stumps of trees were etched upon one's eyes. Along the German second line by Bazentin-le-Grand, Bazentin-le-Petit, and Longueval, at the back of the woods, our shells were bursting without a second's pause and in great clusters. They tore open the ground and let out gusts of flames. Flame-fountains rose and spread from the German trenches above Pearl Wood. The dark night was rent with all these flames, and hundreds of batteries were feeding the fires.

Every calibre of gun was at work. The heavy shells, 15-inch, 12-inch, 8-inch, 6-inch, 4·7, came overhead like flocks of birds—infernal birds with wings that beat the air into waves and came whining with a shrill high note, and swooped to earth

with a monstrous roar. The lighter batteries, far forward, were beating the devil's tattoo, one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four, with sharp knocks that clouted one's ears. I sat on a wooden box on the top of an old dug-out in the midst of all this fury. There was a great gun to my left, and every time it fired it shook the box, and all the earth underneath, with a violent vibration.

The moon disappeared soon after 3 o'clock, and no stars were to be seen. But presently a faint ghost of dawn appeared. The white earth of the old, disused trenches about me became visible. A lark rose and sang overhead. And at 3.30 there was a sudden moment of hush. It was the lifting of the guns, and the time of attack. Over there in the darkness by Mametz Wood and Montauban thousands of men, the men I had seen going up, had risen to their feet and were going forward to the second German line, or to the place where death was waiting for them, before the light came.

6

The light came very quickly. It was strange what a difference a few minutes made. Very faintly, but steadily, the dawn crept through the darkness, revealing the forms of things and a little colour in the grass. The sandbags at my feet whitened. Over at Ovillers there were clouds of smoke, and from its denseness red and white rockets shot up and remained in the sky for several seconds. Other rockets, red and white and green, rose to the right of Contalmaison towards Bazentin-le-Grand. Our infantry was advancing.

A new sound came into the general din of gun-fire. It was a kind of swishing noise, like that of flames in a strong wind. I knew what it meant.

"Enemy machine-guns," said an artillery observer, who had just come out of his hole in the ground. There must have been many of them to make that noise.

Our own artillery had burst out into a new uproar. I could see our shells bursting farther forward, or thought I could.

"I believe our men are getting on," said an officer, staring through his glasses.

The gunner observer had one eye to a telescope.

"There's too much mist about. And, anyhow, one can't

make out the confusion of battle. It's always hopeless. And what the devil is that light ?"

"Must be a signal," said the gunner officer. "I think I'd better report it."

He put his head into the dug-out, and spoke to a man sitting by a telephone.

At 3.55 the light was clear enough for one to see German shrapnel, very black and thick, between Mametz Wood and Bazentin Wood. High explosives were bursting there too. The enemy had got his guns to work upon our infantry.

At 4 o'clock there was a humming sound overhead, and I looked up and saw the first aeroplane flying towards the German lines, just as I had seen one on the first day of battle. It flew very low—no more than 500 feet high—and went very steadily on towards the furnace—brave moth !

At 4.10 there was a red glow to the right of Montauban. It rose with a pulsing light and spread upwards—a great torch with sparks dancing over it.

"By Jove!" said one of the men near me. "That's Longueval on fire!"

In a little while there was no doubt about it. I could see the sharp edge of broken buildings in the heart of the red glow. The village of Longueval was in flames.

From behind the north-west corner of Mametz Wood a great rosy light rose like a cloud in the setting sun, but more glowing at its base. It died out three times and rose again, vividly, and then appeared no more. The gunner observer was bothered again. Was it a signal or an explosion ? With so many lights and flames about it was difficult to tell.

At about 4.30 I heard another furious outburst of machine-gun fire in the direction of Longueval, and it seemed to spread westwards along Bazentin-le-Grand and Bazentin-le-Petit. I strained my eyes to see any of our infantry, but dense clouds of smoke were rolling over the ground past Contalmaison and between Mametz and Bazentin Woods. It seemed as if we were putting up a smoke-barrage there, and later a great volume of smoke hid the ground by Montauban.

The enemy's artillery was now firing with great violence. Enormous shell-bursts flung up the earth along the line of our advance, and the black shrapnel smoke was hanging heavily above. It seemed to me that some of their guns were firing

wildly and blindly. High explosives burst down below Fricourt, where there was nothing to hurt, and in places far afield. The German gunners had got the wind up, as soldiers say, and now that darkness had gone and daylight come our men must have gone far ahead, if luck was theirs. Had they broken the second German line? Men waiting for any news of them found the strain of ignorance intolerable. . . . What were they doing up there?

7.

The first men to come back from the battle were the wounded. They were the lightly wounded, or at least men who could walk. They came across the fields in twos and threes at first, or alone, single limping figures, at a slow pace. But after an hour or two they came in a straggling procession from the first-aid dressing-stations up in the lines—men with bandaged heads, men with their arms in slings, men with wounded feet, so that they could only hop along with an arm round a comrade's neck.

Some of them were all blood-stained, with blood on their faces and hands and clothes. Others had their uniforms torn to tatters, and there were men who were bare almost to the waist, with a jacket slung over one shoulder. There was hardly a man among them who wore his steel helmet, though some carried them slung to the rifle, and others wore German helmets and German caps. Ambulances were waiting for them, and the stretcher-bearers were busy with the bad cases. The stretcher-bearers had done their duty as gallantly as the fighting men, and some of their own comrades were among the wounded.

But they had been reinforced by men who do not belong to the R.A.M.C. Some of the stretchers were being carried by men in grey uniforms with flat round caps, who walked stolidly looking about them, at all those British soldiers, and at those fields on the British side, with curious eyes as though everything were strange to them. They were German prisoners paying for the privilege of life, and glad to pay.

Later in the day there came down a long column of these men, not carrying stretchers, but marching shoulder to shoulder, under armed escort. There were over 700 of them in this one convoy, as a living proof that the day had gone well for

British arms. They were tall, sturdy men for the most part, and in spite of their ordeal by fire most of them looked in good physical health, though haggard and hollowed-eyed and a little dazed. There was a number of wounded among them who dragged wearily by the side of their luckier friends, but those who were badly hurt travelled with our own wounded, and I saw several of them on the lorries with their hands on the shoulders of men who had gone out to kill them.

So the backwash of battle came down like a tide, but long before then I knew that we had broken the second German line and that our men were fighting on the high ground beyond. The village of Longueval was ours. Bazentin-le-Grand, both wood and village, and Bazentin-le-Petit were ours. A gallant body of men had swept through Trônes Wood, on the extreme right of the line, and patrols were pushing into Delville Wood and towards the highest ridge behind the broken German trenches. On the left our men had swept up and beyond Contalmaison Villa, which stands far north of the village.

Every objective of the attack had been carried and our losses were not enormously heavy. The German lines had been captured on a front of nearly three miles—and the cavalry was going in.

Scottish troops were amongst those who went first into Longueval—men belonging to famous old regiments—and they fought very grimly, according to the spirit of their race, with their blood set on fire by the music of the pipes that went with them. Before the light of dawn came, and when our guns lifted forward, they rose from the ground just north of Montauban and went forward across No Man's Land towards the German trenches. They had to make a distance of 1200 yards over open ground and came at once under heavy shell-fire and an enfilade fire from machine-guns.

The enemy also used smoke-bombs, and the ground was ploughed with high explosives. A number of men fell, but the others went forward shouting and reached the German line. In some parts the wire had not been cut by our bombardment, but the Highlanders hurled themselves upon it and beat their way. Machine-guns were pattering bullets upon their ranks, but not for long. The men poured through and surged in waves into and across the German trenches. Every man among them was a grenadier, provided with bombs and with

supplies coming up behind. It was with the bomb, the most deadly weapon of this murderous war for close combat, that the men fought their way through. The German soldiers defended themselves with their own hand-grenades when their machine-guns had been knocked out in the first-line trenches, but as they sprang out of their dug-outs when the bombardment lifted and our men were upon them they had but a poor chance of life unless they were quick to surrender. I hear that these trenches in the second German line were not deeply dug, and that the dug-outs themselves were hardly bomb-proof.

For once in a way the enemy had been lazy and over-confident, and he paid now a bitter price for his pride in believing that the first line was impregnable. I do not care to write about this part of the fighting. It was bloody work, and would not be good to read. One incident was told me by a kilted sergeant as he lay wounded. From one of the dug-outs came a German officer. He had a wild light in his eyes, and carried a great axe.

" I surrender," he said in good English.

And in broad Scotch the sergeant told him that if he had an idea of surrendering it would be a good and wise thing to drop his chopper first. But the German officer swung it high, and it came like a flash past the sergeant's head. Like a flash also a bayonet did its work.

8

While men were " cleaning up " the dug-outs in the first-line trenches other men pressed on and stormed their way into Longueval village. The great fires there which I had seen in the darkness had died down, and there was only the glow and smoulder of them in the ruins. But machine-guns were still chattering in their emplacements.

In one broken building there were six of them firing through holes in the walls. It was a strong redoubt sweeping the ground, which had once been a roadway and was now a shambles. Scottish soldiers rushed the place and flung bombs into it until there was no more swish of bullets but only the rising of smoke-clouds and black dust. Longueval was a heap of charred bricks above-ground, but there was still trouble below-ground before it was firmly taken. There were many cellars in which Germans fought like wolves at bay. And down in the darkness

of these places men fought savagely, seeing only the glint of each other's eyes, and feeling for each other's throats, unless there were still bombs handy to make a quicker ending. It was primitive warfare. The cave-men fought like that, in such darkness, though not with bombs, which belong to our age in this Christian era of grace and civilization.

To the right of Longueval and south of the second German line lies the Trônes Wood, and as it was on the right flank of our attack it could not be left in the enemy's hands. We had held most of it once, a few days ago, and for a few hours, but the enemy's shell-fire had made the place untenable. It was into that fire that some of our English battalions advanced yesterday morning from Bernafay Wood. "They shelled us like hell," said a boy who came from a quiet place in Sussex before he knew what hell is like.

There were machine-guns sweeping the southern end of the woods with cross-fire, and with bursting shells overhead it was a place of black horror in the night. But these English boys kept crawling on to gain a yard or two before the next crash came, and then another yard or two, and at last they came up to the German line, and flung themselves suddenly upon German machine-gunners and German riflemen sheltered behind earthworks and trunks of trees. . . . The wood was captured again, and then a queer kind of miracle happened, and it seemed as if those who had been dead had come to life again. For out of holes in the ground, and from behind the fallen timbers of shelled trees, came a number of English boys, dirty and wild-looking, who shouted out, "Hallo, lads!" and "What cheer, matey?" or just shouted and laughed with a sob in their throats and big tears down their grimy faces. They were West Kents, who had first taken the Trônes Wood and then had been caught in a barrage of fire. With one officer 300 men had dug themselves into the roots of trees on the eastern edge of the wood and kept the Germans at bay with a machine-gun.

9

Meanwhile a number of battalions, mostly English, but with some Scots—men who have done as well in this war since the early days of it as any troops who have fought in France—were attacking the line between Longueval and the

two Bazentins. They, too, found the wire uncut in places, but they went through in a tearing hurry, hating the machine-gun fire and resolved to end it quickly. They stormed the German trenches and fought down them with bombs and bayonets. German soldiers came out of the dug-outs and begged for mercy. They came holding out their watches, their pocket-books, their helmets, anything that they thought would ransom their lives, and when they had been taken prisoners they made no trouble about carrying back the English wounded, but were glad to go! It was all in the darkness, except when shell-bursts lit the ground, and some of our battalions lost their sense of direction towards Bazentin Wood. Prisoners acted as guides to their own lines. Five or six of them unwillingly led the way back. A British officer of nineteen, a boy who had only been in France a month or two, led one of the companies forward because his brother-officers had fallen.

"Come on, lads!" he shouted. "I'm only a kid, but I'll show you the way all right."

They liked those words, "only a kid," and laughed at them.

"He's a plucked 'un, he is," said one of the men who followed him. They went after him into Bazentin Wood, and others followed on, into and through a heavy barrage of fire.

So it was on the left, where other battalions were at work pressing forward in waves to Contalmaison Villa and the ground beyond. The second German line had fallen before our men, and they were over it and away.

10

It was at about 6 o'clock in the evening that some British cavalry came into action. They were the men whom I had seen on my way up to the battlefield, a small detachment of the Dragoon Guards and also of the Deccan Horse. They worked forward with our infantry on a stretch of country between Bazentin Wood and Delville Wood, rising up to High Wood (Foureaux Wood), and then rode out alone in reconnaissance, in true cavalry formation, with the commander in the rear. Lord! Not one in a thousand would have believed it possible to see this again. When they passed, the infantry went a little mad, and cheered wildly and joyously, as though these men were riding on a road of triumph.

So they rode on into open country, skirting Delville Wood. Presently a machine-gun opened fire upon them. It was in a cornfield, with German infantry, and the officer in command gave the word to his men to ride through the enemy. The Dragoons put their lances down and rode straight into the wheat. They killed several men and then turned and rode back, and charged again, among scattered groups of German infantry. Some of them prepared to withstand the charge with fixed bayonets. Others were panic-stricken and ran forward crying "Pity! Pity!" and clung to the saddles and stirrup-leathers of the Dragoon Guards. Though on a small scale, it was a cavalry action of the old style, the first on the Western front since October of the first year of the war.

With thirty-two prisoners our men rode on slowly, still reconnoitring the open country on the skirt of Delville Wood, until they came again under machine-gun fire and drew back. As they did so an aeroplane came overhead, skimming very low, at no more than 300 feet above ground. The cavalry turned in their saddles to stare at it for a moment or two, believing that it was a hostile machine. But no bullets came their way, and in another moment it swooped over the German infantry concealed in the wheat and fired at them with a machine-gun. Four times it circled and swooped and fired, creating another panic among the enemy, and then it flew off, leaving the cavalry full of admiration for this daring feat. They could ride no farther, owing to the nature of the ground, and that night they dug themselves in. German guns searched in vain for them, and the cavalry to-night is full of pride, believing with amazing optimism that their day may come again. [It was after all only a "fancy stunt," as soldiers call it, and it seems certain now that the cavalry is an obsolete arm of war on the Western front. The Tanks have taken their place.]

The scene all through the afternoon behind the battle-lines and down in little villages beyond the reach of guns will stay in my mind as historic pictures. Numbers of wounded men—with a very high proportion of lightly wounded among them—arrived at the casualty clearing-stations, and while they waited their turn for the doctors and nurses lay about the grass, fingering their souvenirs—watches, shell-fuses, helmets, pocket-books, German letters, and all manner of trophies—and telling their adventures in that wild battle of the night.

They seemed to have no sense of pain, and not one man groaned, in spite of broken arms and head wounds and bayonet-thrusts. Every dialect of England and Scotland and Ireland could be heard among them. There were men from many battalions, and as they lay there talking or smoking or sleeping in the sunlight, other processions came down in straggling columns, limping and holding on to comrades, hobbling with sticks, peering through blood-stained rags, tired and worn and weak, but with a spirit in them that was marvellous.

XIV

THE WOODS OF DEATH

1

JULY 17

WE are again in the difficult hours that inevitably follow a successful advance, when ground gained at the extreme limit of our progress has to be defended against counter-attacks from close quarters, when men in exposed positions have to suffer the ravaging of the enemy's artillery, and when our own gunners have to work cautiously because isolated patrols of men in khaki may be mistaken in bad light for grey-clad men in the same neighbourhood. This period is the test of good generalship and of good captains.

The weather was rather against us to-day. There was a thick haze over the countryside, causing what naval men call "low visibility," and making artillery observation difficult. It was curious to stand on high ground and see only the dim shadow-forms of places like Mametz Wood and the other woodlands to its right and left, where invisible shells were bursting.

Our shells were passing overhead, and I listened to their high whistling, but could see nothing of their bursts, and for nearly an hour an intense bombardment made a great thunder in the air behind the thick veil of mist.

We were shelling High Wood, from which our men have had to retire for a time owing to the enemy's heavy barrage of high explosives, and we were also pounding the enemy's lines to the north of Bazentin-le-Grand and Longueval, where he is very close to our men. Hostile batteries were retaliating upon the woodlands which we have gained and held during the past three days.

2

This woodland fighting has been as bad as anything in this war—most frightful and bloody. Dead bodies lie strewn

beneath the trees, and in the shell-holes are wounded men who have crawled there to die. There is hardly any cover in which men may get shelter from shell-fire.

The Germans had dug shallow trenches, but they were churned up by our heavies, and it is difficult to dig in again because of the roots of great trees, and the fallen timber, and the masses of twigs and foliage which have been brought down by British and German guns. When our troops went into Trônes Wood under most damnable fire of 5·9's they grubbed about for some kind of cover without much success.

But some of them had the luck to strike upon three German dug-outs which were exceptionally deep and good. Obviously they had been built some time ago for officers who, before we threatened their second line, may have thought Trônes Wood a fine dwelling-place, and not too dangerous if they went underground. They went down forty feet, and panelled their rooms, and brought a piano down for musical evenings.

A young company commander found the piano and struck some chords upon it at a time when there was louder music overhead—the scream of great shells and the incessant crash of high explosives in the wood. Farther on, at the edge of the wood, our men found a machine-gun emplacement built solidly of cement and proof against all shell splinters, and it was from this place that so many of our men were shot down before the enemy's gunners could be bombed out.

3

One of the most extraordinary experiences of this woodland fighting was that of an English boy who now lies in a field-hospital smiling with very bright and sparkling eyes because the world seems to him like Paradise after an infernal dwelling-place. He went with the first rush of men into Mametz Wood, but was left behind in a dug-out when they retired before a violent counter-attack.

Some German soldiers passed this hole where the boy lay crouched, and flung a bomb down on the off-chance that an English soldier might be there. It burst on the lower steps and wounded the lonely boy in the dark corner.

He lay there a day listening to the crash of shells through the trees overhead—English shell-fire—not daring to come out.

Then in the night he heard the voices of his own countrymen, and he shouted loudly.

But as the English soldiers passed they threw a bomb into the dug-out, and the boy was wounded again. He lay there another day, and the gun-fire began all over again, and lasted until the Germans came back. Another German soldier saw the old hole and threw a bomb down, as a safe thing to do, and the boy received his third wound.

He lay in the darkness one more day, not expecting to live, but still alive, still eager to live and to see the light again. If only the English would come again and rescue him!

He prayed for them to come. And when they came, capturing the wood completely and finally, one of them, seeing the entrance to the dug-out and thinking Germans might be hiding there, threw a bomb down—and the boy was wounded for the fourth time. This time his cries were heard, and the monotonous repetition of this ill-luck ended, and the victim of it lies in a white bed with wonderful shining eyes.

4

The German prisoners have stories like this to tell, for they suffered worst of all under the fury of our bombardment and the coming and going of our troops in the woodland fighting. I spoke with one of them to-day—one of a new batch of men, whose number I reckoned as 300, just brought down from Bazentin-le-Grand.

He was a linguist, having been an accountant in the North German Lloyd, and gave me a choice of conversation in French, Italian, Greek, or English. I chose my own tongue, but let him do the talking, and standing there in a barbed-wire entanglement, surrounded by hundreds of young Germans, unshaven, dusty, haggard, and war-worn, but still strong and sturdy men, he described vividly the horrors of the woods up by the two Bazentins where he and these comrades of his had lain under our last bombardment.

They had but little cover except what they could scrape out beneath the roots of trees. And the trees crashed upon them, smashing the limbs of men, and shells burst and buried men in deep pits, and the wounded lay groaning under great branches which pinned them to the ground or in the open where

other shells were bursting. From what I can make out some of the men here retreated across the country between Bazentin and Delville Woods, for they were the men who were captured by our cavalry.

"My comrades were afraid," said this German sergeant. "They cried out to me that the Indians would kill their prisoners, and that we should die if we surrendered. But I said, 'That is not true, comrades. It is only a tale. Let us go forward very quietly with our hands up.' So in that way we went, and the Indian horsemen closed about us, and I spoke to one of them, asking for mercy for our men, and he was very kind, and a gentleman, and we surrendered to him safely."

He was glad to be alive, this man who came from Wiesbaden. He showed me the portrait of his wife and boy, and cried a little, saying that the German people did not make the war, but had to fight for their country when told to fight, like other men. All his people had believed, he said, that the war would be over in August or September.

"Are they hungry?" I asked.

"They have enough to eat," he said. "They are not starving."

He waved his hand back to the woodlands, and remembered the terror of the place from which he had just come.

"Over there it was worse than death."

5

Over there on the one small village of Bazentin-le-Grand our heavy howitzers flung an amazing quantity of shells on Friday morning. The place was swept almost flat, and little was left of its church and houses but reddish heaps of bricks and dust, and twisted iron, and the litter of destruction. Yet there were many Germans living here when the men of some famous regiments came through in the dawn with bayonets and bombs, Yorkshiremen and some of the Scottish all mixed together, as happens at such times. There was one great cellar underneath Bazentin-le-Grand large enough to hold 1500 men, and here, crouching in its archways and dark passages, were numbers of German soldiers.

They came to meet our men and surrendered to them. And here also lay many wounded, in their blood, and unbandaged—

just as they had crawled down from the ground above where our shells were smashing everything.

If any man were to draw the picture of those things or to tell them more nakedly than I have told them, because now is not the time, nor this the place, no man or woman would dare to speak again of war's "glory," or of "the splendour of war," or any of those old lying phrases which hide the dreadful truth.

XV
PRISONERS OF WAR

1

JULY 17

IN spite of bad weather, which has hampered operations so that no great advance has been possible, we have made some progress to-day in the direction of Pozières.

Some of our troops stormed a double line of trenches from Bazentin-le-Petit to the south-east of Pozières, a distance of 1500 yards, strewn from one end to the other with German dead and wounded.

High Wood, or the Bois de Foureaux, as it is properly called, is to a great extent No Man's Land, as lying over the crest of the hill our men could be shelled by the direct observation of the enemy's artillery, over the heads of their own men in the lower edge of the wood.

Our line therefore has been drawn back from this salient and straightened out from Longueval to the long trench by Pozières, which is now approached on both sides.

Ovillers is ours, after a German post which had been bravely defended surrendered with two officers and about 140 men early this morning. There is no other news of importance to-day on the line of attack, but it is good enough, and the general position of our force is improved.

2

What is the German point of view about our attack and the prospects of the war?

That is the question I have always had in my head during the last fortnight, when I have seen batches of prisoners being led down from the battlefields, and the question I have put to some of them in bad German or fair English.

It is difficult to get any clear answer, or an answer of any real value. The men have just come out of dreadful places, many of them are still dazed under the shock of shell-fire, some of them are proud and sullen, others are ready to talk but ignorant of the battle-front in which they have been and of the situation outside the dug-outs in which they crouched.

Yet there is something to be learnt out of their very ignorance, and by putting together answers from separate groups of men and individual soldiers one does get a kind of hint of the general idea prevailing among these German troops against us.

Quite a number of them have told me that they and their people were sure that the war would be over in August or September. They have been promised that, but could not give any reason for belief except the promise.

"Do you think you are winning?" I asked one man—of real intelligence.

"We thought so," he answered.

"And now?"

He raised his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"The English are stronger than we believed."

There seems to me no doubt that they were perfectly confident in the strength of their lines. They did not believe that such defences as those at Fricourt and Montauban could ever be broken.

The new power of our artillery has amazed them—they speak of it always with terror—and the officers especially admit that they did not imagine that "amateur gunners," as they call our men, could achieve such results.

For the courage of our infantry they have always had a great respect, remembering the two battles of Ypres, but they count the strength of armies by the strength of guns, and until recent days knew they had the greater power.

The foundations of their belief are shaken, but only to the extent that they admit the possibility of their army having to retire to a new line of defence.

I have not found one man speak of defeat. They are still convinced that the German army will never be beaten to the point of surrender. As the German doctor whom I have previously quoted said to me a few days ago, "You are strong and we are strong. Neither side can crush the other. If the war goes on it will be the suicide of Europe."

These German soldiers do not want it to go on. That idea in their heads is clear enough. They are weary of war, and have a great craving for peace. They want to see their wives and children again. One strain of thought creeps out in their talk. It is the suggestion that they fight not as free men desiring to fight, but as men compelled to fight by higher powers, against whom they cannot rebel.

"It is our discipline," said one of them to-day. "We cannot help ourselves."

I am told by one of the officers in charge of them that they talk of another inevitable war between Germany and England in ten years from now.

They have been taught to believe, he says, that we thrust this war upon them, that all through we have been the aggressors, and that Germany will seek her revenge.

3

Personally, I have not heard such words spoken, but rather from several of these prisoners a frank hatred of war as the cause of horrors and suffering beyond the strength of man to bear. They talk as men under an evil spell put upon them by unknown powers beyond their reach.

As I have said, all this does not amount to anything of real value in trying to see into the spirit of the German people. They are the opinions of prisoners, who have escaped from the worst terrors of war, but are immediately cautious of any interrogation, and perhaps a little tempted to say pleasing things to their captors. They cannot conceal their ignorance, which is enormous, because all but victories have been hidden from them until their own defeat, but they conceal their knowledge.

I was interested, for instance, to hear them deny any great suffering from hunger in their own country.

"Our people have enough to eat," said several of them when I questioned them. When I told them of the letters captured in their dug-outs, all full of pitiful tales about lack of food, they stared at me with grave eyes, and said again, stoutly:

"They have enough to eat. Bread enough, and meat enough."

Their first desire upon coming from the battlefields is water, which they get at once, and their next is permission to write

home to their people. All of them are anxious to be sent at once to England, where they expect greater comforts than in the fields with barbed-wire hedges, where they are kept on the way down until they can be entrained.

As I watched them to-day again I thought of our men who are prisoners, and of all the great sum of human misery which has been heaped up in this war. Fortunately, in our treatment of prisoners we teach our enemies a lesson in chivalry, for it is not, I think, in our race or history, with rare exceptions, to kick men when they are down.

XVI

THE LAST STAND IN OVILLERS

1

JULY 18

IN all the fighting during the past fortnight the struggle for Ovillers stands out separately as a siege in which both attack and defence were of a most dogged and desperate kind.

The surrender of the remnants of its garrison last night ends an episode which will not be forgotten in history. These men were of the 3rd Prussian Guard, and our Commander-in-Chief, in his day's dispatch, has paid a tribute to their bravery which is echoed by officers and men who fought against them. It is a tribute to our own troops also, who by no less courage broke down a stubborn resistance and captured the garrison.

I have already described the earlier phases of the siege; the first attack on July 1, when our men broke through the outer network of trenches and advanced through sheets of machine-gun fire, suffering heavy casualties, the seizure of separated bits of broken trench-work by little bodies of gallant men fighting independently, gaining ground by a yard or two at a time and attacking machine-gun posts and bombing posts by hand-to-hand fights; the underground struggle in great vaulted cellars beneath the ruined town; the surprise attack at night when a number of fresh troops sprang upon the defences to the western side of the town, and then, linking up with the men in the captured trenches and ruins, cut the place in half, took many prisoners, and isolated the enemy still holding out in the northern half of the position.

Many different battalions had taken a share in the fighting, all had suffered, and then given way to new men who knew the nature of this business, but set grimly to work to carry on the

slow process of digging out the enemy from his last strongholds. It was almost literally a work of digging out.

2

The town of Ovillers does not exist. It was annihilated by the bombardments and made a rubbish-heap of bricks and dust. When our men were separated from the enemy by only a yard or two or by only a barricade or two the artillery on both sides ceased fire upon Ovillers, lest the gunners should kill their own men.

They barraged intensely round about. Our shells fell incessantly upon the enemy's communication-trenches to the north and east so that the beleagured garrison should not get supplies or reinforcements.

We made a wall of death about them. But though no shells now burst over the ground where many dead lay strewn, there was artillery of a lighter kind, not less deadly. It was the artillery of machine-guns and bombs. The Prussian Guard made full use of the vaulted cellars and of the ruined houses.

They had made a series of small keeps, which they defended almost entirely by machine-gun fire. As soon as we advanced the machine-guns were set to work, and played their hose of bullets across the ground which our men had to cover. One by one, by getting round about them, by working zigzag ways through cellars and ruins, by sudden rushes of bombing parties led by young officers of daring spirit, we knocked out these machine-gun emplacements and the gunners who served them, until, yesterday, there was only the last remnant of the garrison left in Ovillers.

These men of the 3rd Prussian Guard had long been in a hopeless position. They were starving because all supplies had been cut off by our never-ceasing barrage, and they had no water-supply, so that they suffered all the torture of great thirst.

Human nature could make no longer resistance, and at last the officers raised a signal of surrender, and came over with nearly 140 men, who held their hands up.

The fighting had been savage. At close grips in the broken earthworks and deep cellars there had been no sentiment, but British soldiers and Germans had flung themselves upon each other with bombs and any kind of weapon.

But now, when all was ended, the last of the German garrison were received with the honours of war, and none of our soldiers denies them the respect due to great courage.

"They stuck it splendidly," was the verdict of one of them to-day, and though there is no love lost between our army and the enemy's, it is good at least that we should have none of that silly contempt for the foe which is sometimes expressed by people—never by British soldiers—who unconsciously discredit the valour of our men by underestimating the courage and tenacity of those who fight us.

XVII

THE SCOTS AT LONGUEVAL

1

JULY 20

THE present stage of our advance is causing us very hard fighting for important positions on high ground which must be gained and held before new progress over open country is possible. The enemy is gathering up his reserves and flinging them against us to check the onward movement at all costs, and it seems to me that he has brought up new batteries of heavy guns, because his artillery-fire is increasing.

His prisoners reveal the grave anxiety that reigns behind the German lines, where there is no attempt to minimize the greatness of our menace. The enemy is undoubtedly straining every nerve to organize a new and formidable resistance.

To-day, however, he has lost many men and valuable ground, not only in fighting with British troops, but with the French, who at Maurepas and other positions on our right have made a successful advance.

In the early hours of this morning, after a long bombardment which made the night very dreadful with noise, and the sky vivid with the light of bursting shells—such a night as I described at length a day or two ago—an attack was made by our troops on the high ground between Delville Wood and High Wood and to the west of these positions.

The enemy was in great strength, and maintained a strong defence, but he suffered severely, and was forced to retreat in disorder upon some parts of his line.

2

A good deal of the fighting fell to south-country boys who once followed the plough and still have the English sky in their

eyes. But not far from them were some of the "Harry Lauder lads," who used to man the battlements of Edinburgh Castle when Rouge Dragon knocked at the gate and asked admittance for the King.

They had a bad night—"the worst a man could dream of," said one of them who had known other bad nights of war. They lay under the cross-fire of great shells, British and German. Field-batteries were pumping out shells in a great hurry before breakfast-time, but these were as nothing compared with the work of the heavies.

We were firing "Grandmothers" and "Aunties," those 15-inch and 12-inch shells which go roaring through the air and explode with vast earth-shaking crashes. And the enemy was replying with his coal-scuttles.

"They were the real 'Jack Johnsons,'" said a Devonshire lad who had a piece of one of them in his right shoulder. "These brutes have not been seen, I'm told, since Ypres, except in ones or twos. But they came over as thick and fast as hand-grenades. You know the kind of hole they make? 'Tis forty feet across and deep enough to bury a whole platoon."

"The din fairly made me quake," said a tall lad with the straw-coloured hair one sees on market days in Ipswich, and he shivered a little at the remembrance of the night, though the sun was warm upon him then.

But they did not suffer much from all this gun-fire as they manned their trenches in the darkness. The shells passed over them, and few were hurt. The attack was made before the dawn up the rising slope of ground towards high roads which used to go across from the Bois de Foureaux, or High Wood as we call it, to Delville Wood.

Now there are no roads, for our bombardment had torn up the earth into a series of deep craters. The Germans had a line of dug-outs here, built in great haste since the 1st of July, but well built.

As soon as our men were upon them, the German soldiers, who had been hiding below-ground, came up like rabbits when the ferrets are at work. Most of them ran away, as hard as they could, stumbling and falling over the broken ground.

"They ran so hard," said one of our men, "that I couldn't catch up with 'em. It was a queer kind of race, us chasing 'em,

and they running. The only Germans I came up with were dead 'uns."

But some of the Germans did not run. They came forward through the half-darkness of this dawn with their hands raised. One Cornish boy I knew took five prisoners, who crowded round him crying " Kamerad ! " so that he felt like the old woman in the shoe.

Up to that point our casualties were very slight, but later on, up the higher ground, the enemy's machine-gun fire swept across the grass and the brown, bare earth of the old trenches, and above the high rims of the shell-craters. But our men swept on.

Other troops were working round High Wood on the left, and in the centre men were advancing into the wood itself, and forcing forward over the fallen trees and branches and the bodies of German dead. The enemy's shells crashed above them, but these regiments of ours were determined to get on and to hold on, and during the day they have organized strong points, and captured the western side and all the southern part of this position.

3

The situation at Longueval and Deville Wood, on the north-east of that village, has been very full of trouble for our men ever since these places were taken by some of our Highland regiments on July 14. The enemy made repeated counter-attacks from the upper end of the village, where he still held some machine-gun emplacements, and kept a way open through his trenches here on the north so that he could send up supports and supplies.

From the north also he concentrated heavy artillery-fire on the southern part of Delville Wood, which was held by some of our South African troops, and maintained a violent barrage.

Nevertheless the Highlanders have held on for nearly a week with a dogged endurance that has frustrated all the efforts of the enemy to get back on to their old ground. The gallantry of these men who wear the tartans of the old Scottish clans would seem wonderful if it were not habitual with them.

Their first dash for Longueval was one of the finest exploits of the war. They were led forward by their pipers, who went with them not only towards the German lines but across them and into the thick of the battle.

It was to the tune of "The Campbells are coming" that one regiment went forward, and that music, which I heard last up the slopes of Stirling Castle, was heard with terror, beyond a doubt, by the German soldiers. Then the pipes screamed out the Charge, the most awful music to be heard by men who have the Highlanders against them, and with fixed bayonets and hand-grenades they stormed the German trenches.

Here there are many concealed machine-gun emplacements, and dug-outs so strong that no shell could smash them. Some of them were great vaults and concreted chambers of great depth, where many Germans could find cover. But the Highlanders went down into them with great recklessness, two or three men flinging themselves into the vaults where enemies were packed. They were scornful of all such dangers.

I am told by one of their colonels that in bombing down the communication-trenches they threw all caution to the wind, and while some of the men went along the trenches others ran along on top under heavy fire, cheering their comrades on, and then leaping down upon the enemy.

The Germans defended themselves with most stubborn courage, and even now, or at least as late as last night, they still serve some machine-guns at one point, from which it has been found difficult to dislodge them. They are down in a concrete emplacement, from which they can send out a continual spatter of bullets down the ruined way of what once was a street.

The Highlanders dug trenches across the village, and had what they call in soldiers' language "a hell of a time," which is a true way of putting it. The enemy barraged the village with progressive lines of heavy shells, yard by yard, but by the best of luck his lines stopped short of where some ranks of Highlanders were lying down in fours, using frightful words to keep their spirits up. There were hours of bad luck, too, and one was when some of the transport men and horses were knocked out by getting into a barrage. Casualties were heavy among other officers and men, but the Highlanders held on with a wonderful spirit.

4

It is a spirit which I saluted to-day with reverence when I met these men marching out of the fire-zone. They came marching across broken fields, where old wire still lies tangled and old

trenches cut up the ground, and the noise of the guns was about them.

Some of our heavy batteries were firing with terrific shocks of sound, which made mule-teams plunge and tremble, and struck sharply across the thunder of masses of guns firing along the whole line of battle. There was a thick summer haze about, and on the ridges the black vapours of shell-bursts, and all the air was heavy with smoke. It was out of this that the Highlanders came marching. They brought their music with them, and the pipes of war were playing a Scottish love-song :

> I lo'e nae laddie but ane,
> An' he lo'es nae lassie but me.

Their kilts were caked with mud and stained with blood and filth, but the men were beautiful, marching briskly, with a fine pride in their eyes. Officers and men of other regiments watched them pass and saluted them, as men who had fought with heroic courage, so that the dirtiest of them there and the humblest of these Jocks was a fine gentleman and worthy of knighthood.

Many of them wore German helmets and grinned beneath them. One brawny young Scot had the cap of a German Staff officer cocked over his ear. One machine-gun section brought down two German machines besides their own. They were very tired, but they held their heads up, and the pipers who had been with them blew out their bags bravely, though hard up for wind.

And the Scottish love-song rang out across the fields. Whatever its words, it was, I think, a love-song for the dear dead they had left behind them.

XVIII

THE DEVIL'S WOOD

1

JULY 21

DELVILLE WOOD, to the right of Longueval, is a name marked on the war-maps, but some of our soldiers, who take liberties with all French place-names, giving a familiar and homely sound to words beyond the trick of their tongues, call this "The Devil's Wood."

It is a reasonable name for it. It is a devilish place, which has been a death-trap to both the German and British troops who have held it in turn, or parts of it. It is here and in High Wood to the north-west of it that the fighting continues hotly. Last night and to-day the northern end was under the fire of our guns, the southern end under German fire, and somewhere about the centre the opposing infantry is entrenched as far as it is possible to dig in such a place.

The German soldiers have the advantage in defence. They have placed their machine-guns behind barricades of great tree-trunks, hidden their sharpshooters up in the foliage of trees still standing above all the litter of branches smashed down by shrapnel and high explosives, and send a patter of bullets across to our men, who have dug holes for themselves below the tough roots.

There is no need for either side to do any wood-chopping for the building of their barricades. Great numbers of trees have fallen, cut clean in half by heavy shells, and lie across each other in the tangle of brushwood. Branches have been lopped off or torn off, and are piled up as though for a bonfire. The broken trunks stick up in a ghastly way, stripped of their bark, and enormous roots to which the earth still clings have

been torn out of the ground as though by a hurricane, and stretch their tentacles out above deep pits.

The wood is strewn with dead, and wounded men are so caught in the jungle of fallen branches that they can hardly crawl through it. Even the unwounded have to crawl on their way forward to fight, over, or underneath, the great trunks which lie across the tracks.

The gallant South Africans, who were here could not dig quickly enough to get cover from the shells which the enemy's guns pumped into the wood, as soon as our men had gained it, and found it very hard to dig at all, but now, I hope, our troops are more secure from shell-fire and the enemy is suffering severely from our bombardment. His machine-guns chatter through the day and night from one or two strong emplacements, and our men, lying behind their own stockades, effectively reply. In the twilight of "The Devil's Wood" the struggle goes on, but gradually we are enclosing the place and the Germans in it are not there for long.

2

JULY 27

At about ten o'clock this morning our troops again took Delville Wood—all but a narrow strip on the north—and perhaps it is the last time that it will be necessary to send men to the assault of this evil position which has earned the nickname of "Devil's Wood" from soldiers who have been through it and out of it.

As one of our officers said to me this morning, "I wish to goodness we could wipe the place off the map, or burn it off. A good forest fire there would cleanse the ground of this filthy wreckage of trees which has been a death-trap to so many good fellows."

It is a queer thing that so many trees are still standing, and that it still looks like a wood as I saw it the other day when the enemy was barraging this side of it. In spite of all the trees that have been cut down by shells the foliage still looks dense at a distance and hides all the horror underneath.

To-day many more trees have been slashed off and hurled upon other fallen trunks. If the wood had been drier the forest fire would have blazed. I am told that our concentration

of guns for this morning's bombardment secured the most intense series of barrages upon one position since the battle of Picardy began twenty-seven days ago; twice as heavy as any similar artillery attack.

The bombardment began early this morning, and took line after line from south to north above the ground held by our men, in progressive blocks of fire. Our batteries over an area of several miles, from the long-range heavies to the 18-pounders far forward, flung every size of shell into this "Devil's Wood," and filled it with high explosives and shrapnel so that one great volume of smoke rose from it and covered it in a dense black pall.

It seems impossible that any Germans there could still be left alive, but it is too soon yet to know whether our men found any of them crouching in holes or lying under the shelter of great trunks and roots. Perhaps a few German soldiers may come out from this place of death, having escaped by what seems like a miracle, except that every day men do escape in the strangest way from shells which burst above them and under them and around them.

But there will not be many who may tell the tale of this morning's bombardment of the wood, for the enemy has not had time to make an elaborate system of dug-outs here, deep enough to protect them from 6-inch or 8-inch shells, but had no more cover than our own men who held the wood when it was the turn of the enemy's artillery.

3

I was talking to some of these men this morning and they all had the same tale to tell. "Devil's Wood," said one of them—a shock-headed Peter in shorts, who had not lost his sense of humour, though a good deal of blood, up there—"this Delville Wood, as it is called politely by fellows who don't know the look of it or the smell of it, is easily the worst place on earth, as far as I can guess.

"It's just crowded with corpses, and to stay there is to join that company. The only cover one can get is to crawl under a log and hope for the best, or crawl into a shell-hole and expect the worst—which generally arrives. I had the devil's own luck—a puncture of the left leg—so I can't walk back there."

He was amazed to have come out so easily, and because he still had life, and could see the sun shining through the flap of a tent, he was in high spirits, like all our men who have had the luck to get a "cushie wound," which in this war is the best of luck to men in such places as "Devil's Wood."

The other men were eloquent about the German snipers who were hidden in the foliage of trees with rifles and machine-guns and waited very patiently until any of our men began to crawl through the tree-trunks. That game is finished. Our bombardment this morning must have swept away all such men with whatever weapon they had.

Devil's Wood has become more crowded with dead, and it is over these bodies that our men stumbled this morning when they went forward slowly and cautiously behind the great barrage of our guns, which cleared the way for them. They advanced in waves, halting while another barrage was maintained for half an hour or more ahead. They had to cross Princes Street, which was a sunken road made into something like a trench by the South Africans, and afterwards by Scots from home, striking across the glades from west to east, and then they pushed northwards.

I have no details of the fighting, which is still in progress, but it is probable that the attack has succeeded without many casualties. It is in holding the ground that the worst time comes to the men who capture it.

4

Meanwhile another attack has been made this morning, advancing eastwards to Delville Wood from Longueval, which is partly in and partly out of the wood, with the object of clearing out the enemy from the northern part of the village and joining up with the men advancing into the wood from the south, as I have just described.

Here, again, not much more of the fighting is known, but we know the difficulties of the position, and it is not surprising that the hardest fighting has been happening here. The history of the fight that has gone on in this corner of ground since July 14 is one of the most wonderful things, for sheer stubborn courage, that has been done in all this great battle.

The Scottish troops who first took Longueval, as I have described in a previous dispatch, held part of the village in spite of heavy counter-attacks and incessant bombardments, while the South Africans were in the adjoining wood of devilish fame.

The home-grown Scots had a trench—a poor thing, but still called a trench—running from east to west at the south end of the village, and two parallel roads going out of this trench northwards through the ruins of the village.

There were barricades up these two roads held by the Scots with machine-guns, and on the other side of the barricade the roads were No Man's Land leading to the enemy, who were, and still remain, in bits of copse and ruined gardens and old orchards, with their own machine-guns protected by strong emplacements.

The Scots had a severe time, under almost continuous fire, and lost heavily. At night they were attacked from the orchard land by parties of German bombers, who advanced with desperate courage although swept back again and again by rifles and machine-guns and hand-grenades. Meanwhile the South Africans were being shelled to death in Delville Wood close by, and, as I have already told, the poor remnants of them were withdrawn.

The troops in Longueval were replaced by others, who succeeded in clearing the enemy out of part of the orchard and capturing some of his machine-guns, but not enough to " clean up " this position, which was still very dangerous. It was another battalion of Scottish troops, together with English boys of the New Army, who captured Waterlot Farm, running down south-eastwards from Delville Wood, and made two or three very gallant attempts to get as far as Guillemont, and on July 22 another part of Longueval was taken a third time by these fine men, whose General has trained them to attack and to go on attacking.

5

Delville Wood proved the stumbling-block again. One young officer who was wounded here yesterday told me that he could get no kind of cover where he lay with his men at the edge of Delville Wood and on the outskirts of Longueval.

All night long there was the swish of machine-gun bullets above him, varied with shrapnel and bits of high explosive.

He has only been out in France a fortnight, and two days ago came straight to "The Devil's Wood," into the heart of Inferno.

On his first day he was surprised to come face to face with a German soldier. The young officer had been given orders to push out a patrol down a sap or shallow trench to reconnoitre the position of the enemy. He had not gone many yards before he met the enemy—a tall fellow in a steel helmet, followed by forty others.

There was surprise on both sides and considerable alarm, but the English boy was first in with a revolver shot. He thinks now that he made a mistake because the Germans made no attack upon him and ran back into the wood, so that it is likely enough they had come forward to surrender, as a means of escape from our shell-fire.

Our lieutenant came back to report, dodging snipers who "potted" at him from several directions, and then lying in a ditch until a fragment of shell caught him.

"Longueval is the very devil," says this subaltern with two days' experience of war—and enough too. "With Delville Wood on its right it's not a healthy neighbourhood. But of course Brother Boche is getting it in the neck all the time, so he can't be pleased with his position."

To-day there are other men attacking the same position, up against the same difficulties, subject to the same fire.

Those who went before them have gained the immortality of history—a poor reward, perhaps, for great struggles and great suffering, but theirs, whatever the value of it, for all time, when the secrets of the war are told.

The men who are now in are of the same breed, and will not fail for lack of courage, but as I write the guns are firing with a great tumult of noise over there, and new history is in the making so that it cannot yet be known.

6

JULY 29

I have already described in a previous dispatch the great difficulties that have confronted our men in Longueval and

Delville Wood, and I left off my last narrative at a time when our troops were making a strong attack upon both of those positions—the battalions on the left endeavouring to clear the enemy from the north of Longueval, where they had machine-gun redoubts, and those on the right working up from the south through Delville Wood.

The infantry advanced stage by stage behind our shell-fire—a very simple thing to write or read, but not at all a simple matter to troops walking under the hurricane of shells and depending for their lives upon the scientific accuracy of gunners calculating their range and their time-fuses a long way behind the lines, and unable to see the infantry advancing to attack.

"It was queer to see the shells bursting in front of one," said a bright-eyed fellow, who had just come out of "Devil's Wood" with a lucky wound. "The line of them was just about seventy-five yards ahead of us, flinging up the ground and smashing everything. It was wonderful how the gunners kept it just ahead of us."

Our men did not go through Delville Wood in one of those fine cheering rushes which are drawn sometimes by imaginative artists, and sometimes, but not often, happen. They went in scattered groups, keeping touch, but in extended order and scrambling, stumbling, or crawling forward as best they could, in a place which had no clear track.

There were not two yards of ground without a shell-hole. Fallen trees and brushwood made a tangled maze. Old barricades smashed by shell-fire and shallow trenches scraped up by men who had been digging their own graves at the same time made obstacles and pitfalls everywhere. Our men, heavily loaded with their fighting kit, with bombs slung about them, and with their bayonets fixed, could not go forward at a bound through this infernal wood.

This wood had been taken four times by four waves of British troops. It had been retaken four times by four waves of German troops. It had been the dumping-place of the artillery's most furious bombardments on both sides, so that these English boys of ours were advancing through a great graveyard of unburied dead.

The ghastliness of the place has left its mark upon the minds of many men who are not troubled much by the sights of

battle. I notice that some of them wince at the name of Delville Wood, and others—the officers mostly—laugh in a way that is not good to hear, because it is the laughter of men who realize the great gulf of irony that lies between the decent things of life and all this devildom.

7

When our men advanced they were surprised to see men running away through the broken trees, and astonished, also, to see bits of white rag fluttering above some of the shell-holes. These white rags, tied to twigs, bobbed up and down or waved to and fro as signals. It was the white flag of surrender, held by German soldiers crouched at the bottom of the shell-craters. From one of them a Red Cross flag waved in a frantic way.

Our men went forward with their bayonets, and shouted, "Come out of it, there!" and from each shell-hole came a German soldier, holding his hands up, and crying "Pity! Pity!" which is a word they seem to have learnt in case of need.

"Some of them were so small and young," said a man who was fighting in this part of the wood, "that their uniforms were much too big for them and their tunics came down to their knees."

They were exceptional in youth and size, for all the prisoners I have seen since the beginning of our attack are tall, strapping fellows of the best fighting age; but it is possible that our men have come up against some of the 1916 class. When the English poked their bayonets at them, but not into them, they fell on their knees and cried for mercy.

It was mercy asked and given at a time when our soldiers were angry, for the enemy was firing a large number of gas-shells.

Early in the afternoon a good deal of the ground to the north of Longueval had been captured by very fierce fighting at close quarters in and about the orchard, where the enemy had machine-gun emplacements and a strong redoubt called Machine-gun House. Here they defended themselves stubbornly behind barricades of broken bricks and fallen tree-trunks and barbed wire, serving their guns in a deadly way.

Several of our officers behaved with the utmost gallantry and led forward many bombing parties to the attack of the machine-gun emplacements, from which there came a continual swish of bullets. Our men were quite reckless in taking all risks, and made repeated attacks on this position left of Delville Wood until they captured or knocked out several of the machine-guns which had given most trouble.

8.

In the meantime the troops on the right were gradually pushing their way up to the top of the wood, past Princes Street (an old trench dug by the Scots, and now battered out of shape by the morning's bombardment), and across a line of dug-outs made by the enemy—and very well made in the time. They are master diggers, the Germans, and they have the industry of ants. It is sometimes an industry inspired by fear; but, after all, fear is often the wisdom of defence, and in this case they fought longer because by night and day they had toiled to get shell-proof cover into which death could not enter easily.

Some men of ours who were first to go into those dug-outs tell me that they were as deep as those they had seen in parts of the line where Germans have had months for their work. They had plenty of head cover, of timber balks and sandbags and earth, and inside them was room for twenty men or more.

When our men came through the trees to them there were two officers sitting outside as though at a cottage doorway, and they seemed quite calm, except for their extreme pallor.

They were both wounded, but not badly, and it is our men's idea that they had come to sit in the open in case they should be buried alive in the dug-outs by direct hits from our heavy shells. They rose and showed their wounds, and surrendered.

Some of our men went into the mouths of the dug-outs, and cautiously, with their bombs handy, down the dark steps. There were forms huddled up in that narrow stairway, and they groaned at the touch of boots. They were badly wounded men, who had staggered down to get shelter and medical aid. Down

below, in rooms about ten feet square and almost dark, were other wounded men lying about in their own blood.

A lantern hanging on a nail in one of these places gave a dim flicker of light to the scene, and showed the white, unshaven faces of the men who, as our young soldiers came tramping and stumbling down, raised their heads, but had no strength to stand up. Two or three men, unwounded, or only slightly wounded, came forward with their hands held up a little, and bowed their heads as they muttered something which meant surrender.

Early in the afternoon the enemy made a counter-attack upon the left of the wood and to the north of Longueval village. At the same time their artillery had received word somehow, by fugitives, that the wood was full of English, and that they could shell it without killing many of their own men. German "crumps" now began to crash through the trees, and a counter-bombardment of high explosives fell into the cratered earth.

The attack by German infantry was made by strong parties of grenadiers, who came down saps above Longueval and from a communication-trench between Delville Wood and High Wood. They came on with great resolution, followed by machine-gunners, but they were received with rifle-fire, bombs, and machine-gun fire from our own men.

Some parties managed to work their way back into the orchard, and through the scattered trees about it, and there was some close and desperate fighting. For a time our men in one of the battalions were short of bombs, and sent back urgent messages for new supplies.

"We had been hanging on to them," said one of the boys, "because it's always well to save them for a tight place, but of course we sent them up to the chaps in front." It was timely help, and all the German efforts to dislodge our men broke down with heavy loss, so that the ground was strewn with their dead and wounded.

Many Germans were seen retreating over the high ground above Delville Wood, to the left. Parties of them ran along the sky-line, and then seemed to drop into a sunken road.

So Delville Wood is ours again—and it is again under the fire of German guns instead of British guns, and the trouble is to know whether it is possible for either side to hold such a place without too great a sacrifice of life. It is easier to hold

now that the ground to the north of Longueval and in the western corner of the wood has been cleared of its hornets' nests—those hiding-places of machine-gunners who were able to send waves of bullets upon our advancing men.

That trouble, anyhow, is gone, and the enemy feels the loss, because several new counter-attacks last night failed as completely as those made earlier. They were our machine-guns which met them in their old haunts, and made them pay back a heavy price for the toll they had taken before.

XIX

THE WORK OF THE GUNS

1

JULY 24

MORE ground has been gained to-day at Pozières, and the Australians after their first great assault before dawn yesterday have been pushing across the Bapaume Road, which goes through the town, and bombing out the German machine-gunners and holding parties on the western side, so that not many enemies are left among the ruins or underground in Pozières itself. There is higher ground beyond, towards the Windmill, and farther north, for which a fight will have to be made before the key of the position is really captured, but the advance of English regiments on the left is a menace to the enemy which must cause him grave anxiety. The line has also been thrust forward a little by a series of posts and joined up with positions in the neighbourhood of High Wood, where the enemy is again bombarding heavily, so that no further progress has been made in this direction during the day.

One curious incident was observed here by the troops holding the ground on the south of High Wood. They suddenly noticed a body of men coming out of the glades, and were surprised to see that they were in kilts.

For a moment it may have occurred to them that they were some of the wounded Scots who had fought through High Wood a few days previously. That could hardly be possible, however, because the enemy is in strong numbers in the upper part of the wood. An officer staring through his glasses uttered a word of astonishment and two of anger. The men on the sky-line were Germans dressed up in kilts taken from the dead. Our guns put some shells over them, and they disappeared below the ridge.

For the past few days the increasing strength of the enemy's artillery, especially of heavy guns, has been noticeable, and he has been firing at longer range, and rather wildly "into the blue" in order to make things uncomfortable behind our lines.

Owing to the great superiority of our observation and the complete failure of his own aircraft—our anti-aircraft guns have hardly been called upon to fire a round during the last few weeks—he is wasting a great deal of heavy ammunition. This is different from earlier days of the battle when the German gunners had to concentrate their fire upon very definite points of attack, and were completely mastered in many of their positions by the immensity of our bombardment.

2

The work of our artillery is a wonderful achievement, and all the success we have gained during this great battle has been largely due to the science and daring of our gunners and to the labour of all those thousands of men at home who have sweated in soul and body to make the guns and the ammunition.

It is only just and fair to the munition workers to say this thing and to let them know that their toil has helped enormously to break the German lines, and that without their untiring effort all the courage of our soldiers, all their sacrifice of blood, would have been in vain. If they slacken off now in the factories and workshops these men of ours in places like High Wood and Longueval and Pozières will no longer have the support that is most desperately needed now that the enemy is bringing up many new batteries against us.

Flesh and blood cannot fight against high explosives. It can only die, and the whole history of the battle is not to be written in reference to bayonets or rifles but to guns. It has been, and is still, a battle of guns, and our heroic infantry has only been able to get forward or to hold its ground when the artillery preparation has been complete, and the artillery support overwhelmingly strong. Should this fail it would not be fighting, but massacre.

From the early days of the battle onwards our artillery has been great, in weight of metal, in science, in the vastness of its supplies of shells, in the superb courage and skill of its men, who have endured a continuous strain upon them night

and day for four weeks. They broke the German spirit and the German strength to the point when our infantry could attack with something like a chance, almost for the first time in this war along the British front.

By the work of aviators and artillery observation officers we knew the positions of most of the enemy's batteries and the geography of all his communication-trenches, transport roads, and supply depots. Our guns, which had been brought up secretly, were unmasked one morning when the great bombardment began before the battle, and poured unceasing shells upon all those positions, smothering them with high explosives and shrapnel, while the field-guns closer up were cutting the enemy's wire.

Trenches were swept out of existence, batteries were blown to bits—I have seen many of those broken German guns now standing as trophies on French lawns—and the roads were swept by storms of death. The barrage was a great wall through which nothing could pass. The German soldiers in their lines could get neither food nor water. No reinforcements could be sent to them.

3

Three of our own soldiers who were taken prisoners on the morning of the first attack could not be sent back into the German lines because no escort dared to go with them through the barrage. They were thrust down into a dug-out with some of the German soldiers and saw and suffered the effect of our fire. The enemy had no food to give them, having none for themselves, and they were tortured by thirst.

For five days they endured this until nearly dead, but when the Germans were too dazed to act as guards, these three English soldiers managed to crawl out of the dug-out and by a miracle of luck escaped back to their own lines over No Man's Land.

4

A German officer, now one of our prisoners, bears witness to the work of our gunners. He was sent with his battalion from Verdun to Contalmaison and was detrained at Bapaume. There he began a painful experience of shell-fire through an accident to one of the German 12-inch guns, which burst and

blew up several carriages of the train, killing some of his men. But the rest of his journey was made terrible by British gun-fire. With his battalion he came down a road which was being flung up by our 15-inch and 12-inch guns. Some more of his men were killed, and he came on towards Bazentin, where he was under the fire of our 8-inch howitzers and nine-point-twos. More of his men were killed, but he went on until near Contalmaison he came within the range of our 18-pounders and lost the remainder of his men. At Contalmaison he was immediately taken prisoner by our attack and was rejoiced to come to his journey's end alive.

"Your artillery," he said, "is better than anything I had seen before, even at Verdun, and worse than anything I had suffered."

All the German officers with whom I have spoken are surprised that an "army of amateurs," as they call us, should produce such scientific artillery work in so short a time, and they also pay tribute to the daring of the field-gunners, who go so far forward to support the infantry attacks.

"They came up," said one of them, speaking of the Mametz Wood attack, "like charioteers in a Roman circus, at full gallop. Many of their horses were killed, but the men were reckless of danger, and placed their batteries in the open as though at manœuvres."

5

The field observing officers are audacious almost to the point of foolhardiness. Before the ground of attack has been cleared of Germans they walk calmly up with a telephonist, sit down on a crest or a knoll commanding a field of observation, and send back messages to a battery a mile or so behind.

When the territory round Contalmaison was still swarming with Germans, one of our officers went forward in this way and made himself at home on the top of a German dug-out, recording flashes and getting excellent information. He went back to his battery for an hour or two, and when he returned to his chosen spot found it occupied by Germans. They wanted to round him up, but he fired a few revolver shots and retired with dignity—to choose another place not quite so crowded with the enemy. Such tales seem fantastic and impossible. But they are true.

There is no doubt that many German batteries have been destroyed, apart from those which have been captured. I saw to-day a map, which told, by little coloured dots, a great drama of war. Each dot represented a German battery discovered by our gunners since the beginning of the battle, and each colour the day it was discovered, and they were arranged on the map so that one could see the exact distribution of the enemy's guns as it has changed during the course of the battle.

Soon after our bombardment began they began to drift down new batteries and there were clusters of little coloured dots at certain spots. But a day or two later they were wiped out, or withdrawn farther back. There was one thick cluster of green dots to the north of Bazentin-le-Grand. It represented many batteries. A day later they had gone.

" What happened ? " I asked.

The gunner officer laughed.

" We just smothered 'em."

They were " smothered " by storms of shells which burst all over these battery positions, over every yard of ground there, so that no gun emplacement could escape.

But other dots are appearing on the map—other little clusters of colour, farther away to the right. The enemy is massing new batteries, and it is from these positions that Delville Wood, High Wood, and other parts of our line are being shelled night and day with fierce and increasing violence.

Those batteries are not so easy to reach. To keep their fire down, and still more to knock them out, we must have a continual increasing flow of guns and ammunition—ammunition in vast and unimaginable quantities, for the figures I have heard to-day of the ammunition we have used during the past three weeks are beyond one's range of imagination. The munition workers at home must not relax their efforts if we are to continue our successes. It is by their labour that the lives of our men can be saved. All the time it is a battle of guns.

XX

THE FIGHTING ROUND WATERLOT FARM

1

JULY 30

THERE was some infantry fighting to-day in co-operation with the French on our right wing, and as far as our own troops were concerned some progress was made to the east of Waterlot Farm, which is on the road going down from Longueval to Guillemont. It was a very hot day, with a scorching sun, but artillery observation was not easy during certain hours owing to a rather thick haze. In spite of this our guns maintained a heavy bombardment upon the enemy's line in support of our troops, who advanced over difficult ground.

Many prisoners surrendered at an early stage of this progress, one batch of 170 men being captured first and other groups being rounded up later, bringing the total number to something more than 200.

It was rather more than a week ago that some of our men pushed our line down from Longueval to Waterlot Farm, on the road to Guillemont, which they held against repeated attacks.

The Germans are very busy digging new trenches to the east of the road, and through these they are able to send up bombing parties and machine-gunners to protect the northern and western approaches to the ruins of Guillemont itself.

2

The first forward movement from Waterlot Farm was made by some Scots who had already been fighting hard since July 14, when they helped to break the second German line. These Scots, whom I have met in many fields of war during the past

year or more, had done well elsewhere, and chased the enemy out of his lines. They were grim men, and ready for a new "crack at the ould Boche" when they took over from another regiment at Waterlot Farm, south of Delville Wood. It was not a farm such as Caldecott would have drawn for his coloured picture-book. There were no cows or sheep in the neighbourhood. It was a collection of ruined buildings and yards which the enemy seems to have used as a dumping-ground for old iron and machinery. There were several derelict engines here, and a steel cupola for a heavy gun emplacement, like those at Liége in the early days of the war, and a litter of wheels and rods and wire, mostly smashed by our shell-fire. As a farm it left much to be desired, but the Scots settled down here and made themselves as comfortable as possible in the circumstances.

In the darkness of that night and the next patrols went out to discover the strength of the enemy. Our young officers and their men, crawling forward over the broken ground, satisfied themselves that "the Boche" was there in strength. They only had to listen to the patter of bullets which whipped the grass to know that he had plenty of machine-guns unpleasantly near.

Those who had not met any of those bullets came back with their reports, and the artillery bombarded the enemy's trenches to make the work of the infantry easier. An advance was made from the farm before dawn, led by bombing parties of the Scots.

It was a quiet and silent walk. The enemy's machine-guns were chattering a little, but there was no great fire, and the Scots reached a trench north of the railway line with only three men and one officer wounded. "That's nothing," said the officer, and he carried on.

It was impossible to go farther at that time. The enemy were holding, very strongly, a trench immediately across the railway line, and they had dug a nest of new trenches on the east of the road, from which they could enfilade our men with rifle and machine-gun fire.

The Scots got well down into a trench which was mostly a series of shell-craters, and looked to their rifles and bombs. There was not much doubt as to what was coming. It came

down the main road from Guillemont—a large force of German soldiers with machine-guns.

At the same time, from the trench parallel with ours, the Germans sprang on to their parapets and came over. The Scots were hardly strong enough to resist these attacks supported by enfilade fire. They were ordered to fall back, and the retirement was carried out without disorder—to say "without panic" would be ridiculous to these men who have fought a score of battles since they came to France—and it was covered by the machine-gunners, who remained as a rear-guard, sweeping down the advanced parties of the enemy, so as to gain time for our men to get back.

3

A second move from Waterlot Farm was made by the same Scots, supported by other troops. The enemy suffered badly.

A very strong force of German bombers made a brave counter-attack on the Scots, but were caught by rifle and machine-gun fire, and fell almost to a man.

"Practically wiped out" was the way in which an officer of the Scots described it. During the afternoon a patrol of our snipers went out on a hunting expedition and sighted a party of Germans carrying down ammunition-boxes. Not all of them reached their journey's end, for the Scottish snipers are good shots.

Some of the German soldiers were sick of the business, and had had too much shell-fire. When dusk was creeping over the countryside a group of them came out of a ruined farm—it had really been a farm in the old days of peace—standing on the left of the main road to Guillemont.

They came holding up their hands as a sign of surrender, and some of the Scots went out to bring them in. But the enemy in the trenches beyond opened fire on their own countrymen, and some of our own were killed and wounded.

When, later on, another party came out, they were not received in a friendly spirit. . . . That night the Scottish stretcher-bearers went out to bring in their wounded, and they

found among them one man of theirs who had been discovered by a German patrol, but left behind because he gave them his water to drink. They thanked him, and said, "Good luck, and a safe return to your own lines!" but when they went away he thought he had been left to die.

XXI

THE PETER PANS OF WAR

1

JULY 31

FOR two days now the sun has been blazing hot, and our fighting men have been baked brown. It is not good fighting weather either for guns or men. A queer haze is about the fields, as thick at times as a November mist and yet thrilling with heat, so that artillery observation is not good for anything like long-range shooting.

Mametz Wood, which is now well behind the lines, looms up vaguely, and, beyond, Delville Wood is hardly visible except as a low-lying smudge on the sky-line. Yet the sun is not shaded by the haze, and strikes down glaringly upon the white roads and the trampled fields, upon transport crawling forward in clouds of dust that rise like the smoke of fires about them, and upon soldiers trudging along with their rifles slung and their packs slipping, their iron helmets thrust forward over the eyes and their faces powdered white as millers'.

It is hot and thirsty work and painful to the spirit and flesh of men, even along roads that are not pebbled with shrapnel bullets. Men on the march to-day were glad of frequent halts, and flung themselves down on the waysides panting and sweating, moistening their dusty lips with parched tongues and fumbling for their water-bottles. They were lucky to have water, and knew their luck. It was worse for the men who were fighting yesterday in the same heat wave up by Waterlot Farm and farther south by Maltzhorn Farm, not far from Guillemont.

Some of them drank their water too soon, and there was not a dog's chance of getting any more until nightfall. Thirst, as sharp as red-hot needles through the tongue, tortured some of

these men of ours. And yet they were lucky, too, and knew their luck. There were other men suffering worse than they, the wounded lying in places beyond the quick reach of stretcher-bearers. "It was fair awfu' to hear them crying," said one of their comrades. "It was 'Water! water! For Christ's sake—water!' till their voices died away."

As usual the stretcher-bearers were magnificent and came out under heavy fire to get these men in until some of them fell wounded themselves. And other men crawled down to where their comrades lay, and in spite of their own thirst gave the last dregs of their water to these stricken men. There were many Sir Philip Sidneys there, not knighted by any accolade except that of charity, and very rough fellows in their way of speech, but pitiful.

There was one of them who lay wounded with some water still in the bottle by his side. Next to him was a wounded German, groaning feebly and saying, "Wasser! Wasser!" The Yorkshire lad knew enough to understand that word of German. He stretched out his flask and said, "Hi, matey, tak' a swig o' that." They were two men who had tried to kill each other.

2

On one part of the battlefields recently were some of the Bantam battalions, those little game-cocks for whom most of us out here have a warm corner in our hearts, because they are the smallest fighting men in the British Army, and the sturdiest, pluckiest little men one can meet on a long day's march. They have been under fire in several parts of the line, where it is not good for any men to be except for duty's sake.

It has generally been their fate to act in support of other troops—troops whom it is an honour to support when they go into action, because their regiments have won fame on all the battlefields of Europe since the Napoleonic wars.

But it is always a dangerous honour to be in support. The attacking troops have often an easier time than those who lie behind them with scanty cover. It is here that the enemy's barrage is likely to fall, and there is not much fun in lying under shell-fire hour after hour, perhaps for two days, without seeing the enemy or getting at him. The ground becomes

strewn with dead and wounded. It is then that to " hold on " means the highest heroism.

The Bantams held on in hours like this, held on gamely and with wonderful grit. They became great diggers, and because they are not very high, a shallow trench was good enough for cover, and they burrowed like ants. " They would as soon forget their rifles as their shovels," said one of their officers to-day. " There is no need to tell them to dig. They get to work mighty quick, being old soldiers now who have learnt by experience."

They are old soldiers in cunning and knowledge, but there are young lads among them. Old or young (and there are many middle-aged Bantams who stand no higher than five feet in their socks) they are all the Peter Pans of the British Army—the Boys-who-wouldn't-grow-up, and, like the heroic Peter Pan himself, who was surely the first of the Bantams, they are eager for single combat with the greatest enemy of England, Home, and Beauty who may come along. They had their chance yesterday, and brought back a number of enormous Bavarians as prisoners fairly captured.

A certain Bantam, ex-boilermaker of Leeds (" the grandest city in the world," he says), and the King's Jester of his battalion, was enormously amused by the incident. He said that each Bantam looked no higher than the match-stick to the candle with each Bavarian. To all these little men the German soldiers looked like giants, but like so many Hop-o'-my-Thumbs they took charge of these Bavarian Blunderbores and brought them back in triumph. They went searching for them in the ruins of Longueval some days ago, and found some of them sniping from the trees. They brought them down with a crash, and collected souvenirs.

This village was a dreadful place when some of the Bantams went into it. Only a few ruins remained, and about these many soldiers of many different regiments went prowling in search of Germans who were still concealed in dug-outs and shell-craters, and who still defended the outskirts of the village with machine-guns, which swept the streets.

There were Highlanders there, so " fey " after their fierce fighting that they went about with their bayonets, prodding imaginary Germans, and searching empty dug-outs as though the enemy were crowded there. The ground was strewn with

dead, and from ruined trenches and piles of broken bricks there came the awful cries of wounded men.

8

There were many wounded—Germans as well as British—and one man tended them with an heroic self-sacrifice which is described with reverence and enthusiasm by many officers and men. It was a chaplain attached to the South Africans who fought so desperately and so splendidly in "Devil's Wood." This "padre" came up to a dressing-station established in the one bit of ruin which could be used for shelter and applied himself to the wounded with a spiritual devotion that was utterly fearless.

In order to get water for them, and the means of making tea, he went many times to a well which was a danger spot marked down by German snipers, who shot our men, agonizing with thirst, as though they were tigers going down to drink. They are justified according to the laws of war, but it was a cruel business. There was one German officer there, in a shell-hole, not far from the well, who sat with his revolver handy to pick off any men who ventured to the well, and he was a dead shot.

But he did not shoot the padre. Something in the fine figure of that chaplain, his disregard of all the bullets snapping about him, the tireless, fearless way in which he crossed a street of death in order to help the wounded, held back the trigger-finger of the German officer, and he let him pass. He passed many times, untouched by bullets or machine-gun fire, and he went into its worst places, which were pits of horror, carrying hot tea, which he had made from the well-water for men in agony because of their wounds and thirst.

They were officers of the Bantams who told me the story, though the padre was not theirs, and their generous praise was fine to hear. It was good also to hear the talk of these men who had just come out of battle with the grime and dirt of war upon them, about the men they love to command.

These young officers are keen, bright-eyed fellows, and in spite of all they had been through—things not yet to be described—they bore but little trace of their endurance. I sat with them under a tent propped up by stretcher-poles, with one

flap tied to an old cart, while the men who had just marched down were lying in groups on the field, mostly without shirts and socks, because of the heat and the long time since they had changed their clothes.

Afterwards I went among the men—all these Peter Pans—who came from all parts of Scotland and the North of England, so that their speech is not easy to a man from the South. They were talking of German snipers and German shells, of all that they had suffered and done, and the boiler-maker, their comic turn, was egged on to say outrageous things which caused roars of laughter from the Bantam crowd. The language of the boiler-maker on the subject of Germans and the pleasures of war would be quite unprintable, but the gist of it was full of virtue and suited the philosophy of these five-foot Cœurs-de-Lion who were grinning round him.

It is the philosophy of our modern knights, who take more risks in one day than their forbears in a lifetime, and find a grim and sinister humour in the worst things of war.

XXII

THE HIGH GROUND AT POZIÈRES

1

AUGUST 5

LAST evening, just as dusk was creeping over the battlefields, the Australians, with English troops on their left, sprang over the parapets of their lines at Pozières, advanced up five hundred yards of rising ground, stormed through the trenches of the second German line, and captured the crest of the ridge which looks down to Courcelette and Martinpuich.

It was a great and tragic surprise to the enemy. They may have believed, I think they did believe, that after the series of battles in the July fighting, the spirit of the British offensive was broken, and that our troops were too tired to make fresh assaults. The German Generals tried to put comfort into the hearts of their men by telling them that the British guns and the British soldiers had done their worst, and that the attack was at an end. The lull deceived them.

Because two or three days had passed without any infantry action after thirty days of unceasing battle there may well have seemed to the enemy a reasonable hope that we should content ourselves with digging in and holding the ground gained. One thing, however, must have disheartened the German troops and prevented any kind of nervous recuperation after the appalling strain of the month's shell-fire. The British guns, which should have been worn out, and the British gunners supposed to be exhausted, went on firing.

They went on all yesterday, as on the day before and more than a month of yesterdays, with their long, steady bombardment, that bombardment which is now rumbling with its sullen shocks of sound as I write, and as it goes on night and day. Long-range guns were reaching out to places far ahead of the

German lines. Courcelette was a ruin. Martinpuich was falling to pieces. There is no safety for Germans anywhere and up in the lines no safety except in the deepest dug-outs for officers and lucky men.

2

As many men as could get into dug-outs to the north of Pozières were down there yesterday, listening to the crashes of our heavy shells, which were smashing the trenches about them and screaming overhead on more distant journeys.

The Australians and English troops, including men of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey regiments, were waiting in their own trenches.

A crescent moon came up. The woods darkened. Shadows crept down from Thiépval. Distant cornfields in the world beyond the war, so near as miles are counted, so far away in peace, became bronzed and red, and then all dark and vague in the evening mist. Above, the sky was still blue, with stars very bright and glistening.

It was, I think, about 9 o'clock—as the clock goes now in France and England—when the British troops left their trenches. They went quietly without any great clamour across that 500 yards of ground, dusky figures, the brown of their khaki no different from the colour of the earth around them, through the gloom of coming night. The Australians worked up to the right, the English to the left. Before them was the German second line on a front of about 3000 yards, and part of that long line which was pierced and taken on July 14, between Bazentin-le-Petit and Longueval, when the British troops went up in waves and astounded the world by their achievement. It was no longer a line of trenches.

It was a wavy line of hummocky and tumbled earth along innumerable shell-craters such as I described at Montauban. Only the dug-outs, or some of them, still remained in all this chaos, filled with living and wounded and dead.

Out of the wreck of earth, as our men advanced, living men came out in groups. They came forward through the dusky night with their hands held up—pitiable shadows. Most of them were utterly nerve-broken—beaten and broken men with

no fight left in them, but only an animal fear and desire of life.

Their surrender was received, and the English and Australians put guards about them and sent them back to our lines while they went on to clear the dug-outs of men who refused to come out, or would not come out, and to deal with those who farther back had still the courage to defend themselves.

There was some bayonet fighting and bombing. From behind the German lines in isolated redoubts machine-guns were at work spraying out bullets. But our casualties were very few; all told, less, I imagine, than in any action of importance during the battles of the Somme. The enemy's losses were heavy. More than 400 prisoners have passed the toll-bar, and others are being brought down. In dead he lost more than that, and his wounded must number high figures. It was a blow which must be grievous to him after all the hammer-strokes of the month, and what is most significant is the troubled state of his soldiers, these dazed and nerve-shattered men who surrendered. They had no pride left in them.

These men were mostly of the 17th and 18th Reserve Divisions of the 9th Reserve Corps, with miscellaneous drafts from various "Ersatz" or reserve battalions, the scourings of the last class whom Germany can, I suppose, put into the field. By that I do not mean they are physically weak or undersized—there are very few German soldiers who could be described like that—but they are not soldiers of the proud and highly trained kind who fought in earlier days of the war. They are men with families and with a great yearning for peace, and no love of this massacre which is ordained by their war lords.

During the night the troops behind them were rallied to make three separate counter-attacks. They came on very bravely—there is nothing the matter with German courage as a rule—but in a spirit of self-sacrifice and stupidly. They walked into our barrage, and our shells caught them and shattered them.

To-day up to the time I write there has been no further attack by infantry, but the enemy's guns have opened and maintained a very fierce fire upon the positions gained by our troops.

The new part of the German second line now in our hands makes up with the other part of his line captured on July 14 a distance of nearly 10,000 yards.

3

AUGUST 7

All last night, which was still and calm, as the weather goes, there was a great hammering of guns, and this morning, when I went out in the direction of Thiépval, the artillery on both sides was hard at work. The enemy was dropping "heavy stuff" in the neighbourhood of Pozières, with occasional shots at long range into fields about quiet villages behind the lines which look utterly peaceful in the warm light of this August sun gleaming upon their church spires and upon the thick foliage of the trees around them.

It was in the midst of a tumult of guns and below the long resonant journeying of great shells on their way to the enemy's territory that I sat to-day with some of the officers who have just chased the Germans out of their trenches to the north of Pozières.

They were all men of Kent around me. The captain is a merry soul, who laughs most heartily over his hairbreadth escapes and still more loudly when he describes little exploits which would make most men shudder at the mere remembrance.

The colonel of his battalion, who sat opposite, is of a different type, quiet and thoughtful, but with a sense of humour also that lights his eyes. And two places off was the M.O.—a doctor who loves his men and would not leave this battalion of the Kents for any other in the army (he has patched up all their bodies after every scrap and did heroic work for them the other night).

Before the fighting began the colonel took the jovial captain up to the line "to view the Promised Land," as he called it. And the Promised Land looked very uninviting on this high ridge—above the blackened ruins of Pozières—where the German second lines were guarded by a tangle of barbed wire. It was also difficult to look at it very long or very closely, because the enemy was "lathering" the field of observation with every kind of "crump" and shell.

"When we popped over the parapet," says the captain, "we advanced into the middle of the Brock's Benefit, and it was obvious that the blinking Boche had got the wind up."

That is to say the enemy was sending up distress signals to his guns, and in the anticipation of an attack was flinging coloured lights over to our lines so as to illuminate any British infantry who might be advancing. These lights were fired out of a special kind of pistol, and when they fell flared up with vivid red and green fires. At the same time the enemy's machine-guns played upon any figures so revealed, so that it was almost certain death to be in those flare-lights. At great risk several men sprang forward into the illumination and kicked out the burning canisters. Then in the momentary darkness the leading companies advanced in waves towards the German trenches south of Mouquet (or, as the soldiers call it, Moo-Cow) Farm.

4

The colonel of the battalion went very gallantly with his men, and as he drew near to the enemy's line saw two figures silhouetted, like his own men had been, against the enemy's lights. He called out to them, thinking they might be his own men working forward on his right. But he saw they were Germans when one man threw up his hands as a sign of surrender, and the other dropped on to one knee to fire a rifle shot. The colonel sprang forward, covering them with his revolvers, and took both of them prisoner.

Without many casualties in spite of machine-gun fire, our men reached the German trenches. Great heroism was shown by a young lieutenant and a party of bombers, who went first over No Man's Land so quickly behind our barrage that they risked death by our own shells and came against the first defence. The officer and several of this first wave were found lying wounded 400 yards farther than the "jump-out" position, and it was their quick advance which scared the enemy and helped to demoralize him.

5

One of the prisoners taken later was a forward observing officer, a Prussian giant well over six feet high and enormously

stout, and he was put in charge of a little Kentish man standing five-feet-one in his socks. The German giant was very frightened at the machine-gun fire of his own people, which was whipping over the ground, and he went back crouching in a bear-like way, prodded from behind by the wee man in khaki. This sight, illuminated by the flares, was seen by the men left behind in our own trenches, and they stood up on their parapets laughing and cheering wildly.

But there were other trenches ahead, and the men "hared" off to these, and found them held by scared men. The Kentish men started bombing down the trench "like mad," and blocked it at each end in case of accidents, while a young officer posted a machine-gun on the left of it.

The position, however, became quite obviously an untenable one, when the Germans rallied and attacked in bombing parties from the farm. Many of them were cut down by the young officer with his Lewis gun and by the Kentish grenadiers, but they brought up machine-guns and made the position "very hot." A lance-corporal behaved very gallantly in going back 700 yards under heavy fire to report the situation, and volunteered to return with the message that the patrol could not be supported and must fall back in small groups. This he did, and returned again in safety with the other party, who brought with them three more prisoners "as samples" (to use their own phrase), including the huge officer whom I have described previously.

They have funny fellows among them—this British battalion—and the amount of comedy they extract from all this grim business is astounding. There is one of their number who was once a member of Fred Karno's troupe, and has not lost his old instincts for a knockabout turn. When he took a prisoner he caught him by the hand and danced a "pas de quatre" with him.

"Offizier?" asked the astounded man.

"Oui, oui," said the comic turn, "and you—prisonnier—savez?"

So much for the men of Kent, though I should like to tell more if I had the time to-night about their medical officer, who tended all the wounded men of two companies and thirty wounded Germans in a subterranean dressing-station (there was no comedy there), and more about their very fine and

fearless colonel, and about the cheerful captain, whose adventures since the war began would fill a book as strange as the "Memoirs" of Marbot.

To-day other men were fighting in the same place, and I must tell at some later time the fine work of the Surrey and Sussex men.

6

AUGUST 11

The enemy has made several attempts to regain the high ground taken from him to the north of Pozières, and yesterday evening, between the hours of five and seven o'clock, he sent out a strong body of infantry to attack our trenches. It was a curious, vain, and tragic, endeavour, like several other counter-attacks launched at the command of the German Staff by men recently brought up as support troops, knowing quite obviously nothing of the country in which they are called upon to fight, and just blundering out with a kind of desperate courage towards our lines. It was exactly thus last evening.

From the prisoners we took it is certain knowledge that these troops had no familiarity with this ground between Mouquet Farm and the Windmill, and when they were ordered to attack regarded themselves as sheep sent to the slaughter. They knew only that the Australians were in front of them, and from what they have heard of the Australians they did not have much hope.

What hope they had was in the guns behind them, and certainly, in spite of all the German guns we have knocked out by counter-battery work, and all those having had to shift their ground from day to day owing to our ceaseless searchings for their emplacements with the aid of our aerial scouts, the bombardment that preceded the German assault was intense and formidable.

The Australians "stuck it," guessing what was to follow. In the trenches they have dug, and the shell-craters, and the old German trenches which are now almost shapeless under our own and the enemy's fire, they held on, and kept their bombs ready, and their machine-guns handy, and watchful eyes, wherever a man could see, upon a row of broken tree-

stumps appearing over the crest of the Pozières Ridge beyond the Windmill.

Then below the crest on the other side of the ridge—the German side—is Mouquet Farm, called " Moo-cow " Farm by men who will still jest, whatever the conditions of life. A small valley or gully runs behind the farm towards the quarries, and it was from this that the German soldiers came streaming out in open order when their guns lengthened range so that they could get forward without walking into their own barrage.

As it happened, they walked into our barrage. Our guns were waiting for them. At the end of a telephone wire was a gunner-general who does not keep people waiting very long when they are in need of his " heavies," and many gunner officers were standing by their batteries ready to give the word " Fire ! " with their guns and howitzers registered on the line across which the enemy's troops would come as soon as they were ordered to attack.

In our lines the trench-mortar batteries were making ready to hurl their high explosives, and the Lewis gunners were eager to get to work instead of standing under German shell-fire.

The enemy's infantry came straggling forward in extended order, and in irregular waves. There were two battalions of them in the open—out in that 750 yards of No Man's Land upon which the evening sun was shining with a golden haze—when our shells burst over them and the trench-mortars made a target of them, and our machine-guns whipped into their ranks with a scourge of bullets.

The men fell face forward in large numbers. Others came on and fell farther from their own lines. Men ran quickly, as though to escape from all the bursting shells, into the Australian lines, flung up their arms, and lay still.

They were very brave. Quite a number of these German soldiers travelled a quarter of a mile over this open ground in spite of the terrific fire concentrated upon it before some bit of shell caught them and killed them, or left them lying there in agony.

No German soldier came through alive. Only a few men out of the two battalions escaped. Men were standing on the parapets of the German line, calling to them, calling them

back, trying to save something out of this senseless slaughter that had been ordered.

The counter-attack was an utter failure, and one is left wondering why the enemy attempt such attacks, predestined to end in disaster. It is an expensive form of reconnaissance to test our strength.

The German soldiers would have a right to call it murder. It seems to show that the enemy's Staff is disorganized, perhaps a little demoralized, by the continual bombardment which cuts their signal lines and prevents the sending up of supports and supplies.

The Australians are still fighting in a way which wins the admiration of their Generals and Staff and of all the army. These clean-cut men, so fine in physique and appearance that one always turns to look at them in any street of war, are not stolid fellows who can stand the test of shell-fire without suffering in spirit.

They are highly strung and sensitive, with a more nervous temperament than many of our English soldiers, but they have a pride and an heroic quality that keeps them steady, and an intelligence in the individual as well as in mass which makes them great soldiers.

7

AUGUST 13

There have been no sensational advances since the great day of July 14, when our men broke through the second German line, but hardly a day passed since then without some progress being made to get a stronger grip on the high ridge which rolls down on the enemy's side from Pozières and the two Bazentins and High Wood. This fighting has been very hard and grim, and the enemy has done his utmost to check every yard of our men's advance by continual curtain-fire, so that to take a trench or two, or to rush over a few dozen yards of No Man's Land, has been a perilous adventure.

It is most excellent, therefore, that last night our men were able to make a further "shove," as they call it, of nearly 400 yards in depth on a front of about a mile. This was to the north-west of Pozières, and at the same time ground was gained on the north-west of Bazentin-le-Petit closer to the German switch-line between us and Martinpuich.

The men who have been fighting this uphill battle, for that is what it is literally and morally, have been showing remarkable qualities. It is an alliance between the Australians and old English regiments with new men in them, including some of the "Derby recruits." Although the Australians have had the greater share of the fighting round Pozières, being in greater numbers, they are the first to pay a tribute to the spirit of the English lads, and their admiration is returned. An episode which happened a week ago shows the way in which they are sharing the struggle.

I have already written how the men of Kent went forward on August 4 and took the German line, under the command of that fine colonel and jovial captain, whose exploits will be remembered. On the right of them were the Sussex men—fair-haired fellows from Arundel and Burpham, and little old villages lying snug in the South Downs, and quiet old market towns like Chichester—Lord!—a world away from places like Pozières. The line of their trenches was in touch with the Australians, and as they scrambled over the parapets at the time of the attacks these comrades on the right shouted out to them,

"Hallo, boys, what's up? Where are you going?"

"Oh, just up along," said the Sussex lads, pointing to a "hot shop," as they call it, where a lot of shells were bursting.

"Is that so? You don't say? Gosh! We'll come with you."

It wasn't discipline. The men had no orders to go, as far as I can make out, but some of them certainly did go, in a friendly way, and joined in the "scrum" up there, where it was no joke.

8

The story of the Sussex men is very much like that of their comrades from Kent which I have told in detail—the bombing down the trenches, the searching of the German dug-outs, the encounters with Germans who were hiding in shell-craters. But some of the episodes have a special character, worth telling.

They show the human nature of the business up there beyond Pozières. After the first rush through the German line it

became a question of catching Germans in shell-holes, which are good places—or good enough—for snipers who prefer to go on killing before they die. A Sussex man who spoke some German took the risk of going out alone to one of these craters and shouted out to the men below:

"If you don't surrender at once we shall shoot you."

Instantly several heads and several pairs of hands appeared.

One man came out with his hands full of gifts and, falling upon his knees, begged for mercy. He had cleared his pockets and his dug-out of little fancy articles like his watch, knife, compass, cigarette-case, scissors, silver soap-box, and pipe-lighter, which he offered humbly as a ransom for his life.

It appeared later that he was in mortal terror of having his throat cut, and he was profoundly grateful when he was taken back to a dug-out and given some whisky and cigarettes. He then asked leave to tell his friends the glad tidings, and when this was allowed he went out with his guards and called to the other men. Immediately a number of them came out of their hiding-places and formed a procession with their hands up.

It was against the Sussex men that the Germans used their "flammenwerfer," or flame-jets. It is a clumsy form of frightfulness, as I guessed when I first saw one of these machines. It takes two men to work it, one with the reservoir strapped to his back, the other pumping out the long spray of flame, which has a range of twenty-five yards. There were eight of these flame-throwers brought against the Sussex lads, but before they had done any damage the sixteen men who advanced with them were all shot down. It is not by "flammenwerfer" that the German counter-attacks have any chance of success.

9

The advance last night when the Australian troops took an important line of rising ground is a further proof that the enemy has not by any means consolidated his defensive positions so strongly that they make the same kind of barrier against us as those which had to be forced in the first attacks.

In spite of all his industry in digging he has not been able to make any system of trenches and dug-outs to withstand our shell-fire. As soon as he gets on with a trench our guns register

upon it and lay it flat. His only protection is in artillery retaliation, and however great its destructive power it cannot give cover to the German infantry crouching in shallow ditches, and having to come up through communication-trenches ploughed by high explosives.

They belong to battalions hurriedly gathered from other parts of the line and flung in to stop the gap. They are the victims of the general disorganization of the divisions and the staffs which have suffered most heavily from our repeated attacks. Behind them, no doubt, the German Headquarters Staff is as cool and deliberate as ever, not allowing itself to be scared by these reverses, organizing new lines of defence in case of need, shifting its guns, playing the old blood-and-iron game with cold, scientific brains that are not affected by the losses or the agonies of men, except as they have an influence upon the operations.

For they are highly trained scientists of war, these German Staff officers, and in defeat, as once in victory, they will, I fancy, be as cold and as hard as steel, and as inhuman as the devil. Therefore it is idle, in my opinion, to hope for a sudden and sensational collapse of the German war-machine, or to argue from local weaknesses and symptoms of bad Staff work a general disorder.

Nevertheless, there are many signs that the enemy is beginning to feel a severe strain upon his defensive strength and that his men are being put to an ordeal which not even all their discipline and their courage can make endurable.

For men of a certain kind of science are apt to forget that there are other things in human nature besides the chemistry of flesh and blood, and that not even the finest soldiers can be made to fight well if their spirit is broken by repeated losses.

10

AUGUST 17

It is at the two ends of our recent line of attack—on the left above Pozières and on the right around Guillemont—that the interest of the present fighting for the moment gathers, and in both these districts some progress has been made by our infantry during the past day or two. The successful advance of the French, northwards from Hardecourt towards Angle Wood,

and their capture of the ravine to the south-west of it, helps to strengthen our lines about Guillemont, especially as some of our troops advancing from the trenches south of Malz Horn Farm, and west of Trônes Wood, linked hands with our Allies yesterday.

I have already described in a previous dispatch the great difficulty of working over the ground about Guillemont and the hard time some of our men have had in pushing forward to the outskirts of that town. The enemy has concentrated a large number of batteries in the country beyond, and near at hand is defending himself from many machine-gun emplacements and a maze of newly dug trenches.

The operations yesterday in conjunction with the French are still in progress and the result at present is indecisive, but with both French and British troops closing upon them the situation of the garrison in Guillemont is not what soldiers would call "healthy."

Yesterday morning I was more interested personally in the left side of the battle-line above Pozières, as from an artillery observation post I was able to get a very clear view of our own and the enemy's ground in this district—ground which has been won and held by English and Australian regiments with a determination and courage which I have described several times with some detail.

There before me on the sky-line was the windmill which should be as famous in the history of this war as the Ferryman's House on the Yser Canal or the château at Vermelles, or the "Tower Bridge" at Loos. Waves of men have surged up the slope to it under storms of shell-fire. To Australians fighting for the high ridge on which it stands above Martinpuich it has been the goal of great endeavour, for which many of them have given their lives. The enemy defended it as if it were a great treasure-house, though only an old building of timber and stone against which the wind of centuries has blown, turning the great black sails which ground the corn of the folk in Pozières before ever a howitzer had been fired in the world or a flying machine had come humming over the hill. The windmill is ours now. Our line sweeps round it and our shell-fire drops on the other side of the slope, barraging the enemy's ways to and from Martinpuich.

But it is only the relic of a mill-house. The timbers have

been blown to atoms weeks ago. The sails fell in the first bombardment, and all that stands now is the stone base in the form of a small pyramid as a memorial of great bloodshed.

II

The enemy yesterday was dropping a heavy barrage all along our line, which runs south of Mouquet Farm and sweeps below the village of Thiépval and its wood.

On the other side of Thiépval Wood the opposing lines run very close together, and here there was not much shell-fire, but on the Pozières side the shell-bursts and smoke-clouds were drifting up and down in a steady, regular way. Our own guns were busy with Mouquet Farm (called by our soldiers "Moo-cow" Farm, or "Muckie" Farm, according to their whim), and, farther off, with Courcelette, whose tall factory chimney sticks up above the ridge, and now and again one of our heavies sent a great shell crashing into Thiépval.

There were no German soldiers to be seen in that village, and no sign of human life at all. It is a ghastly-looking place, with its stripped trees, like withered limbs, and a ruined church above a row of apple-trees, which stand a little separate from the village.

Above is a cemetery with broken tombstones and shell-craters among its graves. Beyond, on a road running northwards, is a tall crucifix with the figure of Christ looking down upon all this death.

In the trenches no man puts his head above the parapet. Several times one of our machine-guns spluttered out a burst of fire as a warning to the enemy to keep well down. The only movement over this village and battlefield was made by shells which tore up the earth and sent drifting smoke-clouds across the ruins.

The doom of Thiépval is creeping closer, for our men are advancing slowly but surely around Mouquet Farm, so that it will be hemmed in. The garrison hiding in the dug-outs below those broken buildings at which I gazed yesterday must be in a state of dreadful apprehension. I should not like to live in Thiépval.

12

AUGUST 20

It is quite impossible to understand the progress of our advance since July 1 without being familiar with the ground over which this has been made and the local conditions of the fighting on our present front.

In my dispatches I have done my best to picture these things and to reveal the heroism of our men by describing, as realistically as one may without being too brutal to one's readers, the appalling difficulties they have to encounter. Even now many people wonder, I dare say, at the various pauses in the victorious progress of our troops, and look forward, day by day, to more smashing blows and greater strides over the enemy's ground.

To me the wonder of this battle is that we should have got on so far and so fast. When one has seen the network of German trenches, their great systems of underground galleries —proof against the heaviest of high explosives—their machine-gun redoubts, against which, if even only one gun is left, it is sometimes difficult to advance, and the power of their artillery able to barrage a strip of ground which our men have to cross, it is astounding that our soldiers could have forced the enemy back from stronghold after stronghold and gained their way to the high positions of the Pozières Ridge.

Take those men of ours who have won their way through a maze of trenches in this last bit of fighting between Pozières and Thiepval.

They had to force their way between machine-gun posts and scramble over ground which is like a billowy sea of earth with deep pits at the bottom of each billow, into which many of them stumbled and fell. Not good going for an attack!

Then they had to storm their way down to the enemy's underground system of galleries, where large numbers of strong and unwounded Germans were waiting with stores of bombs and every kind of weapon.

It is true that many of these men surrender readily at the first rush of our troops, but if those dug-outs are not cleared out at once, and if our men in their eagerness go on, it is quite likely, as it has often happened during the past six

weeks, that the enemy will come up and attack them from the rear.

From one of these holes in the ground which seemed a simple little dug-out there came up, on Friday, as I have already said, six officers and over 150 men. I saw them all to-day, tall fellows with unstained uniforms and a well-fed, fresh, and healthy look.

One of the officers was quite a giant. He was wearing a steel casque of the German pattern, which is very much like a mediæval helm, and he was laughing and joking with his brother-officers as he marched at the head of his company. If these men had come up behind English assaulting parties who had not made sure of the dug-outs first they could have put up a very strong fight, and with one machine-gun might have done great damage.

In their underground galleries they had lived snugly and safe, sleeping on spring beds, reclining on upholstered chairs, in well-furnished rooms so much like those in the upper world that they had even false windows draped with lace curtains.

Our men have to fight below-ground as well as above-ground before they are in possession of an enemy position.

Above-ground it is not good for a quick advance. Our guns have been bombarding so continuously that although the infantry depends utterly upon an effective artillery preparation, and not in vain, the effect of all this shell-fire impedes their progress when the time comes to cross No Man's Land.

It is just a series of shell-craters like a wide stretch of those "trous-de-loup" which used to be dug in the old days of warfare behind the "glacis," and have been revived again in this war, which has adopted every device known to fighting men from the time of Cain onwards.

13

When some of the Australians "went over" the other night this was their great cause of trouble. They rushed forward eagerly, and before they had gone fifty yards most of them had fallen into shell-holes deeper than their own height. It was pitch-dark, except for the white light of the German flares rising and falling, and when they scrambled up the shelving

sides of the craters they were black as ink in this illumination and horribly visible to the German bombers and machine-gunners, who made the most of their opportunity in the time at their disposal.

I stood by a man to-day who, since July 1, has been buried alive by shell-bursts upheaving the earth about him no fewer than six times.

He is a young Australian officer, now wounded in the back and leg, and he assured me that he did not mind this premature burial very much.

"There is mostly a little air to breathe—enough to keep one going for a few minutes," he said, "but of course it's unpleasant waiting to be dug out, if one has the luck. Most fellows mind it very much. But it don't affect me in that way."

This is not an uncommon experience. There are a lot of men buried in an advance when, as the official dispatch says, "We made good progress." So that progress is not a soft job for soldiers. Then the German is beginning to leave a lot of little things behind him, even if he abandons a trench in a hurry. This is a new dodge. One invention which has come into his fertile imagination is a man-trap, which he sets outside his parapet or inside a shell-hole on the way to it. As soon as one of our soldiers sets foot on to it it closes about his leg with a terrific bite and brings him down like a log.

Another little device in devilry is the "tortoise bomb." It looks very much like a tortoise if you happen to see it—which you don't, in the dark—and it stands on four little legs. They waggle a little, but should it be unwarily touched it may detonate the bomb and blow a man to bits.

There was some heroic fighting on Friday afternoon along a road which runs from High Wood to Delville Wood. The heroes of this fight were ordered to take this road with troops on their left and right, and in spite of the shell-holes on the way and heavy machine-gun fire sweeping down on them they took the trench all right, going even a little too far in their eagerness.

Owing to casualties in officers, the sergeants had, in some cases, to carry on the command, and they did so with the calm courage of old soldiers. The German trench, battered by our gun-fire, was full of dead, and littered with rifles and equipment.

A few of the enemy stayed and fought to the death, and others ran away. Three were dragged up out of a dug-out and made prisoners. All looked good, from a fighting point of view, in this section of the trench, and would have been good if the men on the left and right had been able to come up. But they were not able to do this, and presently from the right and left came parties of German bombers, hurling their grenades at our men, who hurled back until every one of their bombs was gone.

Then they grubbed about for German bombs, and used those until they could find no more. It was time to escape, and the way out was through a narrow sap which was also a death-trap if the enemy closed about it.

But the enemy did a strange thing. They came swarming up on both sides, and each side took the other for English soldiers, and, in the dusk, bombed each other furiously over the heads of our men, who slipped away, marvelling at their luck in ill-luck. They had five prisoners when they reached their own lines, for they were joined by two other men (in addition to the three from the dug-out), one of whom was a German hero—tired of heroism—wearing the Iron Cross and another decoration.

So the fighting goes on, and it is the grit of our troops, their splendid obstinacy, their refusal to be beaten by shell-fire or shell-holes, by machine-guns or tortoise bombs, by poison-gas or tear-shells, by Germans above-ground or underground, or dropping high explosives from the sky—"the whole blinking bag of tricks," as they would call it, which keeps them going always a little bit farther.

Unless one knows the cost of victory one cannot tell the greatness of the victors.

14

AUGUST 23

We are getting a stronger grip upon the ridge from Pozières to High Wood. Last night the Australians gained a little more ground, so that they have pushed out a line to the north-east of Mouquet Farm, and the Scottish troops to their right have gained another hundred yards of that famous switch-line into which I took a walk the day before yesterday to see how

we held the enemy's last line of defence on the way to Martinpuich.

The switch-line exists only as a name, and in reality is nothing but a series of shell-craters in which our men have to get what cover they can, after chasing out the Germans, before digging and strengthening an effective trench.

But it is the position that counts, and if we can hold it, as I am now certain we shall, it puts the enemy at a great disadvantage, of which our guns are already making a full and terrible use. The enemy's endeavours to counter-attack—he made two last night—have broken down under our fire with great bloodshed, and now it is not in the least likely that he will succeed in wresting back from us any of the high ground.

The importance of the position is, of course, entirely one of observation, apart from the tactical importance of having driven the enemy on to ground beyond his first and second systems of trenches and dug-outs, so that he can get no strong cover until he retires to a considerable distance.

It gives us vantage-points from which we can observe his movements down the slope, rake him with rifle and machine-gun fire if he sends out working parties, and turn the guns on to him with direct observation of results.

One of the immediate effects of being on the Pozières Ridge was seen yesterday, when our artillery registered something like twenty-five direct hits upon some of the enemy's batteries. He had a great concentration of guns.

Acting in connexion with our aviators, who are always observing from high places, our gunners are punishing the enemy in a very frightful way, and the ground above Thiépval and Courcelette, into which I looked for the first time at close range from the switch-trench, and Martinpuich, and the barren ground to the right of it, is swept by our shell-fire.

A very realistic and tragic picture of what is happening down there beyond the high ridge is given in a letter written on August 10 by a German officer of the 133rd Infantry Regiment:

"The relief yesterday," he wrote, "is incredible. The route taken—Ligny—Warlencourt—Pys—Courcelette—on the way to the trenches was very dangerous. During the first part the thunder of the guns was very disagreeable, and the second part was very unsafe. Heavy shells fell right and left

of the road. Mounted troops, cars, field-kitchens, infantry in column of route, were all enveloped in an impenetrable cloud of dust.

"The last stage consisted of troops in single file crouching on the slope beside the road, with shells bursting overhead. Close to Courcelette a message arrived: 'Enemy firing gas-shells, on with your gas-helmets.' It appeared to be an error. From Courcelette to our position in the line we relieved across the open. If the enemy had only noticed that, what a target he would have had!

"Our position was of course quite different to what we had been told. Our company alone relieved a whole battalion. We had been told we were to relieve a company of fifty men weakened by casualties. The men we relieved had no idea where the enemy was, how far off he was, or if any of our troops were in front of us. We got no idea of our supposed position until 6 o'clock this evening.

"To-night I am taking my platoon out to form a covering party. My men and I are to lie in shell-holes in part of an old demolished trench of ours. The English are 400 metres away. The Windmill is over the hill. The hundreds of dead bodies make the air terrible, and there are flies in thousands. About 300 metres from us is a deserted artillery position. We shall have to look to it to-night not to get taken prisoners by the English. We have no dug-outs. We dig a hole in the side of a shell-hole and lie and get rheumatism. We get nothing to eat or drink. . . . The ceaseless roar of the guns is driving us mad. Many of the men are knocked up. The company commander thinks we were breathing gas yesterday, which slowly decomposes the blood, and this is an end of one. What a variety of ways one can lose one's life in this place! . . . It is getting light. I must start on my way back to the front-line trenches."

From another man in the 3rd Battalion of the 124th Regiment there is a letter which pays a doleful tribute to our flying men:

"I am on sentry duty, and it is a very hard job, for I dare not move. Overhead are the English airmen and in front of us the English observers with telescopes, and as soon as they perceive anything, then twenty-four 'cigars' arrive at once, and larger than one cares to see—you understand what I mean.

The country round me looks frightful. Many dead bodies belonging to both sides lie around."

These letters give the other side of the pictures which I have been describing. They show what German life is like below the Pozières Ridge.

We are drawing very close to Thiépval, and standing yesterday on the high ground to the right of the Windmill by Pozières, within 500 yards of Martinpuich, I could see how near our lines have been pushed to both these places. Thiépval I have seen several times from the western side, but yesterday I stood to the south-east of it looking straight across the cemetery of Pozières to the long line of branchless trees and broken roofs where the German garrison awaits its certain doom.

That doom crept a little nearer last evening when some of our English troops left their trenches south of the Leipzig Redoubt, which was already in our hands, and following in the wake of a terrific bombardment on a short line of the enemy's position took that section quickly by assault. I saw the steady bombardment of the ground hereabouts, which was continuous throughout the afternoon, but, by bad luck, having gone to another part of the line, did not see the attack which followed.

It was a highly organized and grim bit of work, very quickly done and with few casualties on our side. As soon as the guns had lifted, after concentrated fire which tore up the ground and made an utter chaos of the German line of trench, our men followed. They went over in two waves, at as rapid a pace as possible over the tumbled ground. Then they went through the broken strands of barbed wire, and by men watching them from a little distance were seen to drop down into the enemy's trench.

After a little while—less than a minute—the result of the attack was seen by a number of German soldiers coming out of the shell-craters with their hands up. A little later a large group of soldiers ran out and tried to escape. They ran as though the devil were behind them, but there was a devilish fate in front of them, for they plunged straight into a heavy fire from our guns, and disappeared.

In less than a quarter of an hour the fight was over and men came plodding back along the way for " walking wounded,"

and the Red Cross flag could be seen over there in the light of the setting sun.

The enemy must have suffered heavily. Our guns caught them during a relief, which means that there was a double garrison, resulting in a double number of killed, wounded, and prisoners. Worse still for them, it seems likely that on their way up to the lines many of them were caught in the heavy barrage we had for some time been flinging across their route.

Among the 200 prisoners taken there is an ex-waiter of the Savoy Hotel, who says that he is thoroughly sick of the war, like most of his comrades, and that Verdun, from which he has just come, is a heaven compared to the battlefields of Picardy.

Some time after our assault German troops were observed to be massing for a counter-attack behind the captured position, but these were immediately dispersed by our artillery, and no attack took place throughout last night.

The result of the operation is that we now hold a line straight above the Leipzig salient and striking across to our trenches south of Mouquet Farm, where the Australians made an attack yesterday to push farther forward towards Thiépval.

15

The successful advance south of the Leipzig Redoubt was due mainly to the gallant work of some Territorial troops who attacked a maze of German trenches on Friday evening last, carried them by assault, and linked up with the redoubt itself, already in our hands immediately below Thiépval, getting a closer grip at the throat of the garrison there.

I have already told how the men captured the great dug-out and took nearly 600 prisoners. They were men of the Royal Warwicks, who did that great achievement with extraordinarily slight loss to themselves. One of the most thrilling episodes of the attack was when they were held up on the right by a German strong point, from which came a stream of machine-gun fire. The men lay down in front of it, and held on until our own Lewis guns could get to work. Four times a message came over the telephone asking whether the " heavies " should

shell the place, but the colonel was afraid that his men would be hit, and refused the offer each time. Then suddenly, when it seemed impossible to stop that deadly squirt of bullets, the German machine-gun ceased fire and a white flag fluttered up.

The colonel of the Warwicks expected to see twenty men come out of that bomb-proof hiding-place. To his amazement there emerged six officers, and—not 150 men (as I think I said in my last dispatch) but 242 unwounded Germans and six "stretcher cases." There were many acts of great individual gallantry among the Warwicks, and all were splendid under the fine leadership of their officers. One sergeant jumped on to the parados of a German trench and kept a machine-gun team away from their weapon until our bombing party could arrive, thereby saving the lives of many Warwickshire lads and helping to secure victory.

Further along the trench a company officer, held up at a "bomb-stop" or barricade, called for a rifle and fired repeatedly with a cool aim at the German machine-gunners on the other side, with two men by him, who kept refilling his magazine, and bombers behind him hurling grenades over his shoulders.

16

Many of the Germans defended themselves stubbornly, to the death. A sentry standing outside one of the dug-outs saw our men approaching, and, turning quickly, shouted down the word "England!" to his comrades below. One of the Warwicks who was closest to him hurled his last bomb at him, and then, seizing the man's rifle, sprang on to the parapet ready to shoot the enemy as they came up. They came up in a swarm, with bombs, and there was a great conflict which ended only when the last German was dead.

In one dug-out there was, in the midst of all this horror, a comic episode, like that of a clown in tragedy. A curtain divided the dug-out, and a Warwickshire man thrust his bayonet through it. Suddenly the curtain was drawn on one side and a German soldier, yawning loudly and rubbing his eyes with the knuckles of one hand, stood there, as though to say, "What's up?" He had slept heavily through the

bombardment and attack, and now when he saw the English soldiers facing him, believed he was dreaming.

So the Warwicks took 400 yards of trenches along a front of 600 yards and thrust the wedge closer to Thiépval. Meanwhile, in the centre of our line of attack, English and Scots and Australian troops had been fighting for the German switch-line beyond Bazentin-le-Petit, the newly dug trench which the enemy had made feverishly to defend the high ridge above Pozières, but could not hold. They were Scottish troops who took the trench opposite Martinpuich, so gaining at least part of the ground for which we have striven since July 1.

17

It is not long ago, as the calendar counts time, though a lifetime ago for many thousands of men who have fought along the road to Martinpuich since that village with a queer name seemed as unattainable as any dream-city. No man of ours, except our flying men, had ever seen it, for it lies just below the Pozières Ridge, and before the battle opened on July 1 the ridge itself was a high and distant barrier defended all the way by great strongholds like Fricourt and Mametz and Contalmaison, and by all those woods which could be captured, as every soldier knew, only by desperate fighting.

Now, after the greatest battle in British history—a series of battles, rather, in one great and continuous attack—we have gained that ridge above Pozières and the Windmill, and, pushing up to this German switch-line, look down the slopes beyond.

There, only 500 yards away across No Man's Land, lies Martinpuich, as I saw it myself to-day from our front-line trench, surprised that one could see so close into its ruins. To my left as I stood out in the open, above the trenches, was the Windmill for which the Australians have fought—the conical base of it being all that is left as a memorial of the heroism that gained this ground, and behind was Pozières, the desolate, shell-swept ruin which is linked also, for ever, with the memory of those boys from the Overseas Dominion who gave a treasure of life to take it.

The way to Martinpuich is truly " The Street of Adventure "

for hundreds of thousands of our men who have fought their way over the ground about it since that first day of July which was the beginning of the great adventure.

When I went up it to-day, farther than I have ever been before, and to our last post upon it, I passed all the places which will make chapter-headings in any history of the war—the scenes of all the big battles and of all the little desperate conflicts which have been fought along this wing from ditch to ditch, in every tiny copse, in every bit of broken woodland. It is a road of immortality. Alas, also of great death, as one sees all along the way past Fricourt and Contalmaison over ground dotted with new-made graves, where white wooden crosses stick up above the mounds of earth, everywhere, amidst the torn tree-stumps, and very neat between the upheaval of these fields flung into chaos by gun-fire, and clustering thickly about piles of broken brickwork which are still called by their old village-names.

Many of those graves are the size of one man's bed, but others are broad mounds into which many bodies have been laid, with taller crosses, to the remembrance of all of them, such as that "To the memory of the N.C.O.'s and men of the —— Border Regiment who fell in action at this spot on the 1st of July 1916." Many of them are to unknown British soldiers who could not be identified, but whose names are on the long roll-call of honour.

18

On the road to Martinpuich we passed up by Lonely Copse—just a few "strafed" trees—and by Lozenge Wood and the Dingle, and Birch Tree Wood and Peake Wood, and Acid Drop Copse. Do you remember the names? Men fought ferociously to get these places, our artillery registered on them, and I saw them in the first days of July under tempests of shell-fire. Now they can be found only by a few charred sticks, a few black gibbets, standing above heaps of ashes and the bones and dust of men.

Contalmaison, the capital of the woodlands, is on higher ground, and is still the target of German bombardments, as it was our target when I saw it first. Most of its red-brick château was standing when I looked into its windows one day

from an artillery O.P. and saw one of its towers shot away by one of our 15-inch shells, as cleanly as one could cut a slice out of a cake. Now all that is left of the château is a broken wall or two, rose-coloured except where the bricks are blackened by fire, standing in the midst of great shell-craters and solid waves of earth and ash-coloured tree-trunks all hurled about.

A devilish place is Contalmaison now, and when I walked through it yesterday the foul horror of it reeked about me. In the night the Germans had flung thousands of gas-shells into it, and the stench was still prowling about, stealing out of crannies and shell-holes with faint, sickly whiffs as though from rotten eggs. And the smell of corruption came up from all the litter of battle lying there. . . .

We went beyond Contalmaison, and were glad to leave it, for the enemy's shells were bursting over it, and round by Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, thinned out by successive storms of shell-fire to the mere ghost of a wood, with the light striking through its leprous-looking trunks, where many unburied dead lie among the broken trenches. The ground rose gradually past Contalmaison Villa, which stood far beyond the village itself, as the country house of some French gentleman who will never see it again except in dust and ashes, and here we were out in the centre of the battle-ground, where our men are now fighting between the windmill of Pozières and High Wood, on the farthest line of our advance.

The battle was going on, as it goes on all through the days and nights, with never-ceasing gun-fire. The infernal tumult of it was all around us, and death was everywhere for any man whose luck had run out. Lord God in heaven! If a man had any kind of prayer in his soul, or any special form of curse for those who made this war, his lips should mutter it in a place like this.

19

It was into the famous switch-trench which has been the goal of great endeavour since July 14, when our troops broke the German second line, that we went through other trenches after the long walk in the open, and looked at last into Martinpuich, just below the high ridge. Merely to see it was the supreme proof of the greatest achievement in arms ever done

by British soldiers. To get as far as this, to capture the high ground where we now stood, behind earth and sandbags, looking down into the valley beyond, our men have stormed many strongholds, fought through all the ghastly woodlands from Fricourt and Bazentin and High Wood, and many have fallen all along the road to Martinpuich.

The village itself is just like any of all those ruins which have been smashed to bits in this poor France. There was no sign of human life there among the broken buildings. But there was human life, though I could not see it, in the 500 yards of No Man's Land between our first line and the village.

In the deep shell-craters here, as thick as holes in a sieve, there are still some German soldiers living. They have no kind of trench, for there is nothing but open ground before us for 1000 yards, now that we have taken the German switch-line, but in these holes they hide themselves at night and snipe our men by day. They are fellows who have been sent out to hold the ground as much as possible before they are dead or captured, and their officers never expect to see them again. When our guns barrage this stretch of barren land they can be seen hopping from one shell-hole to another, and it is then the turn of our snipers. They brought down thirty-five the first day, after taking the switch-line, and about as many two days ago.

More valuable than a German prisoner—for what's the value in this war of one man's life?—was the German machine-gun brought in a day or two ago from the ground outside Martinpuich, where it lay half buried, but so undamaged that it is now used against the enemy with his own cartridge-belts. Other queer things have been brought back. Two days after the capture of the switch-line our soldiers saw two men waving out there in No Man's Land, and getting their glasses on to them saw that they were wounded Englishmen. A party of Scots crawled out and brought them in, as during the same day they had carried back a number of German wounded lying about in the shell-holes close to our own line.

The real wonder of our men is only to be seen in such places as this. On these battlefields, under heavy shell-fire, they were working as calmly as though they were building sand-castles on the English seaside. Behind them lay many of their dead.

I could track my way back by the blood that splashed the walls of the trenches to the place where a medical officer patches up the bodies of broken men in a hole in the ground.

20

The ground over which I walked with a young Scottish officer—who has no emotion at all about such things because since he went first into Loos he has lived cheek by jowl with death so that any fear he may have had is killed by habit—was nothing but one great stretch of shell-craters. There was not one yard of ground into which a shell had not fallen, over thousands of yards. Some of them were small shells making small craters, others were heavy shells which had made enormous pits, and the rim of one crater met the rim of another, or mingled. And, as we walked, the sky above our heads was filled with shells continuing this work, flinging up the earth again into new hills and hollows.

From our own batteries far away behind us there came a steady bombardment of the German ground just beyond us, and the shells passed overhead with that indescribable sound which is half a scream and half a sigh, enormous in the volume of its noise. But those sounds were comforting compared with others which were coming overhead. They were coming from the enemy's side with a savage overwhelming roar, which ended in a rending explosion.

"Eight-inch," said the young Scot by my side. "Heavy stuff."

It is surprising what effect an eight-inch shell can have in the way of upheaval. But one's sensation is not that of surprise when fifty yards away, or less, a mass of field is suddenly lifted skyward and a smoke-cloud as large as a cathedral stands there strangely solid in the wind. The whole field of battle about us was vomiting up these things, and it was damnable.

XXIII

THE GERMAN SIDE OF THE SOMME

1

AUGUST 9

I HAVE not been across to the enemy's side of the line (except when it has been broken by our guns and men), and I have no intention of following the example of a friend of mine who deliberately tried to get across to them in search of information. But now and again it is possible to get a mental glimpse of how the enemy lives and works and thinks behind the barbed-wire and the ditches and the machine-gun redoubts which make up his defensive system.

I mean the enemy's fighting men, and not all those people in Germany who starve on false promises and grow sick with hope deferred, and count up the number of their dead, and still say, with a resolute pride, "At least—we cannot be beaten."

From talks with prisoners, and explorations of German dug-outs, and the reading of captured documents, and many days spent (before the battles of the Somme) in our own trenches from which through a loophole or a tuft of grass I have looked over to the German lines and seen, not often, but several times, German soldiers moving about in working parties, and German infantry marching down a hill-side over 2000 yards away, I have been able to conjure up a fair answer to questions which have often come into my head: "What are the fellows doing over the way? What are they thinking about and talking about? What does it look like behind their lines? And how do their methods and their 'moral' differ from our own?"

Since the beginning of our attack on July 1 I have gained some later information about those things, and it seems to me interesting to put down a few of the facts, so that people at

home may know more about the enemy than they seem to know.

2

There is no doubt at all that as a fighting man the German knows his business thoroughly and performs it with great skill, courage, and discipline. He has had the advantage of using an enormous reserve of highly trained officers and non-commissioned officers, and although the advantage is rapidly disappearing, because after two years of war we are getting large numbers of the same class of men and he is losing and has lost a great mass of them by death and wounds, he still has, I imagine, more than enough for his needs.

Now, and to the end of the war (for he is careful to keep his best brains out of danger), he can call upon a great store of professional and scientific knowledge to direct the machinery of this business of destruction and defence, and to organize the lives of his machine-made men.

In minute detail of organization, and in a driving industry behind it, the German High Command is masterly, and there is not a soldier in the Kaiser's armies who is not well equipped (down to the "housewife" full of pins and needles, cotton, buttons, and thread, which he carries in his pouch) and well fed, unless our guns do not permit his supplies to come up.

Enormous attention is paid to the "moral" of the men, by organizing concerts, religious services, and beer-parties behind the lines, so that they shall be kept cheerful until they die, and the news of the world, as we all know, is specially edited for them with that point of view in mind.

But the German High Command is careful of the lives of its men until the day comes when they have to be flung ruthlessly forward, in wave after wave, against the guns of the Allies.

Again and again I have described the spaciousness and the depth and comfort of the German dug-outs. That is part of the system of life-saving, and the divisional commanders set their men to work and keep them at work in a way which our men would call slave-driving.

I have described those at Montauban and Fricourt as I saw them immediately after their capture, and after the bombardment which crumpled up all the trenches about them, but left them, for the most part, solid and untouched.

At Ovillers they are even more elaborate, some of them having six or eight rooms communicating with each other, and two separate stories—rooms as large as fifteen feet by thirty feet, furnished with spring beds, carpets, washing arrangements with water laid on, electric light, tapestries to keep out the draughts, and other luxuries. One of the dug-outs at Ovillers has nine entrances, with beds for 110 men, thirty feet below the surface, and with a cook-house containing three big boilers.

But it is not only in the trenches and in places like Ovillers that the Germans dig so industriously. Far behind their lines, wherever our long-range guns can reach them, they have these elaborate subterranean shelters, deeper and stronger than most of ours, and with much greater accommodation. It means incessant work in addition to all the work which keeps our own soldiers busy night and day.

But it is work that saves life, and the Germans do not begrudge it, and have no special pride in taking risks. That is good generalship and good soldiering. But it does not save them. Some of our officers are apt to imagine—I confess it was in my own imagination for a time—that the German was so snug in these burrows of his that our bombardments in normal times without infantry attacks to follow did not cause him many casualties.

The truth is that continuous artillery-fire like ours has been and is frightfully destructive of human life, and that no amount of digging will safeguard it. Transport must move along the roads. Men must go up communication-trenches. Working parties must come out into the open.

During all the month that our artillery has been increasing its weight of metal and the number of rounds fired, the Germans, therefore, have been suffering great losses, and the strain upon the nerves and "moral" of the men has been severe.

This is certain not only from the statements of German soldiers brought into our lines, but from new instructions issued as late as July 16, which refer to the treatment of the great numbers of wounded, and the terrible conditions of the present fighting. Significant sentences reveal the truth of things behind the German lines, and again the organizing minds which try to better them as far as possible :

"As the circumstances of the present fighting do not as a rule permit of a dressing-station being established near the fighting troops, the wounded must at any rate be taken to places which are easy to find, easy to describe, and easy to recognize.

"Companies must inform battalions, and battalions regiments, where the wounded are to be found, and how many there are to remove.

"They can as a rule only be moved at night. The stretcher-bearers who come to fetch them generally waste a good deal of time in searching for the wounded, and sometimes do not find them if they are not assisted by the unit which has been engaged.

"The nights are short for carrying out these large evacuations.

"I have already reminded units that troops which are relieved should carry their wounded with them." That reveals a tragic picture of the enemy's losses. It is emphasized again that many of the wounded are not found, and suggestions are made that pieces of canvas dipped in luminous paint might be used to indicate the whereabouts of the wounded, or white canvas cut into the form of a cross.

The German mind is busy with the problem of its dead also. The enemy goes to great risk and trouble to remove the dead from the fields because the living men who follow are disheartened and terrified by the sight of so many corpses on their way.

Search-parties are sent out under shell-fire to collect them, even though many of the searchers may join the dead, and the bodies are put into mortuary chambers like one found by us the other day at Pozières.

It was filled with dead bodies waiting to be taken away on a light railway which runs up to the place, but the enemy's artillery fired upon this mortuary and set it on fire, as though they were more jealous of their dead than of the living who were our prisoners.

4

I have said that they keep their best brains out of danger. This is true, even when the brains are second-best. It is very seldom that any officer over the rank of a captain is found in the front-line trenches, and officers of higher rank remain

well in the background. Lately, during our attack, orders have been given that officers and N.C.O.'s commanding companies and platoons should visit their trenches at night "so that the men may see or hear their commanders." It is all very naïve, and reveals that curious lack of humour which characterizes the German war lord.

"The men," say these instructions, "should be instructed as to the whereabouts of their commanding officer, and know where to go if they feel that they require inspiring with courage. To stimulate courage and to foster the feeling of confidence and the spirit of resistance, these should be the first duties of an officer in the front line, at all events in the present circumstances. Courage rather than tactful theory is the essence of a true leader."

To give their men courage in hours when these German soldiers, who are brave men, might well give way to terror, the German chemists have manufactured tabloids which drug them with a kind of frenzy. There is no doubt of this, which sometimes I have doubted, because many of these drugs were found by a friend of mine—the medical officer of the Kentish men who helped to take the trenches north of Pozières a few days ago.

They contained ether and opium in sufficient quantity to intoxicate the strongest man. In the German opinion it is good stuff before a counter-attack.

German organization is remarkably good. It does not neglect the spiritual or the physical side of their soldiers. It provides them with song-books and prayer-books as well as with food and drink.

It has never revealed a shortage of shells. Its gunners are full of science and wonderfully quick to get on to their targets when the infantry calls for help by sending up signals of distress.

In all the mechanics of war and in the fine art of keeping up the pride of men the German war lords and high officers show real genius. But they cannot bring dead men to life nor hide the agonies of all their wounded, nor blink the fact that British troops have broken their second line, and hammered them with terrific blows and reached out far with long-range guns to destroy them behind their lines.

They live in many ruins as bad as Ypres—French ruins, alas—and I know that, on the eve of our great attack, all

instructions were prepared for a general retreat, with every detail ready in case our troops should break through on a wide front.

That is a confession of deep apprehension. It shows that they are envisaging defeat and preparing for it—wisely enough—in case of need. It is a state of mind not expressed in an Order of the Day issued by the German Emperor a few days ago, and found on a German officer captured to the north of Pozières:

"To the leaders of the troops of the First Army," says the Kaiser, "I express from the bottom of my heart my deep appreciation and my Imperial gratitude for the splendid achievement in warding off the Anglo-French mass attacks of the 30th of July. They have accomplished with German faithfulness what I and their country expected from them.

"God help them further.

"(Signed) WILHELM I.R."

Since then the ground to the north of Pozières has been captured, and to-day there has been fierce fighting and further progress made by British troops towards Guillemont. God has not helped them it seems.

Behind the German lines, in spite of the Kaiser's gratitude for the courage of his troops—a courage which we must not belittle, for it is great—men are thinking gloomily and wondering when all the agony of this great war, which holds no victory for Germany, will have an ending, after all their blood and all their tears.

XXIV

THE ATTACKS ON THIÉPVAL

1

AUGUST 25

THE doom of Thiépval is near at hand. By a series of small, sharp attacks, in short rushes, after enormous shell-fire, our troops have forged their way across a tangled web of trenches and redoubts until now they are just below the row of apple-trees which still show a broken stump or two below the southern end of the village. They have bitten off the nose of the Leipzig salient, and yesterday I saw them take the Hindenburg Trench and its strong point, which is almost the last of the defensive works barring our way to the south entrance of the village fortress.

On the west our trenches have been dug for some time through Thiépval Wood, within four hundred yards of this place, and on the east they have been pushed forward to the left of Mouquet Farm ; so that we have thrown a lasso, as it were, around the stronghold on the hill, from which its garrison has only one way of escape—by way of the Crucifix, northwards, where our guns will get them. That garrison is in a death-trap. The German soldiers in Thiépval must be praying for the end to come.

As I stood watching the place yesterday, from a trench only a few hundred yards away, it seemed to me astounding and terrible that men should still be living there. I could see nothing of the village for there is next to nothing left of it—nothing at all but heaps of rubbish which were once the roofs and walls of houses. But on the sky-line at the top of a ridge which slopes up from the Leipzig salient there still stand a hundred trees or so, which are all that is left of Thiépval. They stood black and gaunt against the blue sky, without a

leaf, on their broken branches, and all charred. The brown hummocks of the German trench-lines encircled them, with narrow strips of grass, vividly green, between these earthworks and below, falling away to our own lines, a turmoil of upheaved soil where a maze of trenches had been made shapeless by incessant shell-fire.

All through the afternoon, as all through the morning, and the mornings and afternoons of many yesterdays, our guns were firing in a steady, leisurely way, one shell every minute or two, at the ground marked out by the black tree-stumps. They were mostly the shells of our "heavies" firing from long range, so that for several seconds one could hear the long voyage of each shell, listen to the last fierce rush of it over our heads, and then see, before the roar of the explosion, a vast volume of smoke and earth vomit up from the place between the trees, or just below the line of trees where the enemy's trenches lay.

A friend of mine, sitting on some sandbags with his steel helmet just below the tops of some tall thistles which gave friendly cover in our foreground above the parapet, said "Beautiful!" every time there was a specially big cloud-burst. He is such a hater of war that his soul follows each shell of ours with a kind of exultation so that it shall help to end it quickly. But I kept thinking of the fellows below there, under that shell-fire.

It was only previous knowledge, explorations in German dug-outs, talks with men who have come living out of such bombardments, that made me still believe that there were men alive in Thiépval, and that before we take the place they may fight desperately and keep machine-guns going to the last. There was not a human soul to be seen, and the earth was being flung up in masses; but underground a garrison of German soldiers was sitting in deep cellars, trying to turn deaf ears to the crashes above them, trying to hide the terror in their souls, a terror invading all their courage icily, and looking into the little mirrors of long periscopes which showed them the vision of things above-ground, and the stillness of the British trenches, from which at any minute there might come waves of men on a new attack.

2

With a few others in the trench where I stood I knew that our men were to make another bound yesterday afternoon, though not the exact time of it. For nearly two hours I watched the bombardment, steady and continuous, but not an intense fire from all available batteries, and every few minutes I looked at my wrist-watch and wondered "Will it begin now?" Down below me was the hummocky track of our front-line trenches, in which the attacking parties had assembled. Only now and again could I see any movement there.

In our own trench some signallers were carrying down a new wire, whistling as they worked. A forward observing officer was watching the shell-bursts through a telescope resting on the parapet and giving messages to a telephone operator who sat hunched at the bottom of the trench with his instrument. A couple of young officers came along jauntily, swearing because "these silly asses"—whoever they might be—"never tell you where they are." An artillery officer came along for a chat, and remarked that it was a fine day for a football match.

3

It was a day when the beauty of France is like a song in one's heart, a day of fleecy clouds in the blue sky, of golden sunlight flooding broad fields behind the battle-lines, where the wheat-sheaves are stacked in neat lines by old men and women, who do their sons' work, and of deep, cool shadows under the wavy foliage of the woodlands.

Behind us was a ruined village, and German shells were falling into the corner of a wood not far away to our left, but the panorama of the French countryside beyond the edge of the battlefield was full of peace. Above our heads some British aeroplanes came flying, and the hum of their engines was like big bees buzzing. They flew straight over the German lines, and presently the sky about them was dotted with white puffs of shrapnel, and above the noise of the guns there was the high "ping!" of the German "Archies," as each shell reached up to those soaring wings, but failed to bring them down.

Another officer came along the trench and said, "Good afternoon. The show begins in ten minutes."

The "show" is the name soldiers give to a battle.

By my watch it was longer than ten minutes before the "show" began. The leisurely bombardment continued in the same way. Now and again a German "crump" replied, like an elaborate German guttural. Then suddenly, as though at the tap of a baton, a great orchestra of death crashed out. It is absurd to describe it. No words have been made for a modern bombardment of this intensity. One can only give a feeble, inaccurate notion of what one big shell sounds like.

When hundreds of heavy guns are firing upon one small line of ground and shells of the greatest size are rushing through the sky in flocks, and bursting in masses, all description is futile. I can only say that the whole sky was resonant with waves of noise that were long-drawn, like the deep notes of violins, gigantic and terrible in their power of sound, and that each vibration ended at last in a thunderous crash. Or again it seemed as though the stars had fallen out of the sky and were rushing down to Thiépval.

The violence of this bombardment was as frightful as anything I have seen in this war in the way of destructive gun-power. The shells tore up the German trenches and built up a great wall of smoke along the crest of the ridge, and smashed through the trees of Thiépval, until for minutes together that place was only to be known by tall pillars of black, and white, and brown smoke, which swayed about as though in a great wind, and toppled down upon each other, and rose again.

4

A voice at my elbow, speaking breathlessly, said: "Look! They're away. . . . Oh, splendid fellows!"

Out of our front-line trenches scrambled long lines of men. They stood for a moment on the top of the parapet, waited for a second or two until all the men had got up into their alignment, and then started forward, steadily and in wonderful order. Some of the officers turned round, as though to see that all their men were there. I saw one of them raise his stick and point towards the ridge. Then he ran ahead of his men. They were on low ground—lowest on the right, in front

of the parapet where I stood, but sloping up a little on the left by the Leipzig Redoubt. Beyond them the ground rose steadily to the ridge on which Thiépval stands. Our men had a big climb to make, and a long way to go over open country, for four or five hundred yards is the very devil of a way to go when it is swept with shell-fire.

The enemy was not long in flinging a barrage in the way of our men. A rocket went up from his lines as a signal to his guns, and perhaps half a minute after our men had sprung over the parapet his shells began to fall. But they were too late to do any damage there. Our men were out and away. Some message seemed to reach the enemy and tell him this. He raised his barrage on to ground nearer to his own lines, and his heavy "crumps" fell rapidly, bursting all over No Man's Land. Now and again they seemed to fall right into the middle of a bunch of our men, in a way frightful to see, but when the smoke cleared the group was still going forward. On the right of the line one great shell burst with an enormous crash, and this time there was no doubt that it had caught some of our men. I saw them fall in a heap. . . . Perhaps they had flung themselves down to avoid the shell splinters. Perhaps not one of them had been touched. It is extraordinary how men can avoid death like that.

Nothing checked the advance of the long lines of figures going through the smoke; not all the German barrage, which was now very fierce. The men had to cross one of those narrow strips of grass-land between the earthworks before they came to the first line of German trenches, and they showed up black and distinct against this green belt whenever the smoke of the shells bursting above them drifted away.

They were not in close formation. They went forward, after the first few moments of advance, in small parties, widely scattered, but keeping the same direction. Sometimes the parties themselves broke up and separated into individual figures, jumping over shell-craters, running first to left or right as the shriek of an enemy shell warned them of approaching death. I saw then how easy it is to lose all sense of direction in an attack like this, and the reason why men sometimes go so hopelessly astray. But yesterday it was quite marvellous how quickly the men recovered their line when they had drifted away in the blinding smoke, and how the groups kept

in touch with each other, and how separate figures running to catch up succeeded in joining the groups.

5

We watched the single figures, following the fortunes of each man across the fire-swept slope, hoping with all our souls that he would get through and on. Then he would pick himself up when he fell face forward.

For a little while the men were swallowed up in smoke. I could see nothing of them, and I had a horrible feeling this time none of us would ever see them again. For they had walked straight into the infernal fires, and all behind them and all in front the shells were bursting and flinging up the earth and raising enormous, fantastic clouds.

It seemed an hour before I saw them again. I suppose it was only five or six minutes. The wind drifted the smoke away from the Thiépval Ridge, and there, clear and distinct to the naked eye, were the lines of our men swarming up. Some of them were already on the highest ground, standing, single figures, black against the sky. They stood there a second or two, then jumped down and disappeared. They were in the German trenches, close to Thiépval.

"Magnificent!" said a French officer who was standing close to me. "By God, your men are fine!"

They were wonderful. The German barrages did not stop them. They went through and on as though proof against shells. Some men did not go on, and fell on the side of the slope, but it seemed to me there were not many of them.

In the centre of the German trenches was a strong point or redoubt, with machine-guns. It was one of those deadly places that have often checked one of our attacks, and cost many brave lives. But I could see that our men were all round it. One single figure was an heroic silhouette against the blue of the sky. He was bombing the redoubt, and as he flung his bombs the attitude of the man was full of grace like a Greek disc-thrower. A German shell burst close to him and he was engulfed in its upheaval, but whether he was killed or not I could not tell. I did not see him again.

6

Up the slope went the other men, following the first wave, and single fellows hurrying after them. In a little while they had all disappeared. They were in the enemy's trenches, beyond all doubt.

New sounds of an explosive kind came through all the fury of gun-fire, which had slackened in intensity, but was still slashing the air. It was a kind of hard knocking in separate strokes, and I knew it was bomb-fire. Our men were at work in and about the German dug-outs, and there were Germans there who were not surrendering without a fight.

One fight took place on the top of the parapet. A man came up and stood on the sky-line—whether an English soldier or a German it was impossible to see. I think a German, for a second after another man came up as though chasing him, and the first man turned upon him. They both had revolvers and fired, and disappeared. Other men were running along the parapets of the German trenches. They were ours, and they were flinging bombs as they ran. Then a curtain of smoke was wafted in front of them again, and they were hidden.

From our own trenches another wave of men appeared. I think it wanted more courage of them even than of the first line of assaulting troops to go out over that open ground. They had to face the German barrage and to pass over a way where many of their comrades were lying. But they went on steadily and rapidly, just as the others had gone, splitting up into groups, running in short rushes, disappearing in the smoke of shell-bursts, falling into shell-craters, scrambling up, and on again. . . .

Another wave came still later, making their way to that ridge where their comrades were fighting in the enemy's trenches. They, too, disappeared into those ditches.

Only in the ground near to me could I see any sign of life now. Here some of our wounded were walking back, and the stretcher-bearers were at work. I watched a little procession coming very slowly to our trenches with their stretchers lifted high. It was a perilous way of escape for wounded when the enemy was flinging shells all over the ground and there was no safety zone. Somewhere on our right a shell had struck

a bomb-store or an ammunition dump and a volume of smoke, reddish brown, rose and spread into the shape of a gigantic query mark. Other fires were burning in what had been No Man's Land, and out of an explosion in the enemy's trenches there was flung up a black vomit in which were human beings, or fragments of them. Over the ridge by Thiépval the enemy's barrage was continuous on the far side of the slope between our trenches on the west and the ground just gained, and the top of the smoke-clouds drifted above the sky-line as though from a row of factory chimneys.

7

Suddenly out of all this curtain of smoke came a crowd of figures, leaping and running. They were Germans trying to get to our trenches, not in a counter-attack, but to give themselves up as prisoners, and to get some cover from their own shell-fire. Terror was in their attitudes, in their wild stampede and desperate leaps over the broken ground where the shells of their own guns were bursting. One great German "crump" crashed close to them, and I think it must have killed some of them.

Then for more than an hour as I watched, other figures came back from the high ground towards our old front line, sometimes in groups of two or three, sometimes alone. They were our lightly wounded men, with here and there a German.

It was with a sense of horrible fascination that I watched the adventures of these men, separately. One of them would jump down from the sky-line, and come at a quick run down the slope. Then suddenly he would stop and stand in an indecisive way as though wondering what route to take to avoid the clusters of shell-bursts spurting up below him. He would decide sometimes on a circuitous route, and start running again in a ziggag way, altering his direction sharply when a shell crashed close to him.

I could see that he was out of breath. He would halt and stand as though listening to the tumult about him, then come on very slowly. I wanted to call out to him, to shout, "This way, old man! . . . Quick!" But no voice would have carried through that world in uproar. Then perhaps he would stumble, and fall, and lie as though dead. But presently I

would see him crawl on his hands and knees, stand up and run again. He would reach our line of trenches and jump down, or fling himself down. Some cover at last, thank God! So it happened with man after man, and each journey was the adventure of a man trying to dodge death. It was horrible to see.

High above the Thiépval Ridge there were perpendicular streaks of white smoke and light, strangely spectral, like tall thin ghosts wrapped in white shrouds and illumined in a ghastly way. I think they were the long tails of rockets fired as signals to the guns. The German black shrapnel and their green "universal" shell was hanging in big puffs above the denser pall below, and there was the glint and flash of bursting shells stabbing through the wall of smoke.

Our aeroplanes were right over Thiépval all through the battle, circling round in wide steady flights, careless of the German anti-aircraft guns, which were firing continuously. Two hostile planes came out and our men closed about them, and flew to attack, but after a little while the Germans fled back in retreat. The only observation the enemy had was from two kite balloons, poised well forward, but often lost and blinded in all the clouds.

So I watched, and knew, because our men did not come back from those trenches on the Thiépval ridge, that they had been successful. It was only the prisoners and the lightly wounded who came back. The assaulting parties were holding the ground they had captured in spite of all the shell-fire that crashed over them. They had tightened the iron net round Thiépval and drawn it closer.

So at last I went away from the battlefield, back to the quiet harvest-fields flooded with the golden glow of the sinking sun, luckier than the men who had to stay, and ashamed of my luck. The enemy was flinging shells at long range. The harvest-fields were not quite so safe as they looked.

There were ugly corners to pass, shell-trap corners, where it is not wise to linger to light a cigarette. But hell was behind me, up there at Thiépval, where the storm of shell-fire still raged, and where, below-ground, the German garrison awaits its inevitable fate.

8

AUGUST 26

Following the official communiqué, I can now say that the troops whom I saw advancing so splendidly and steadily across a great stretch of No Man's Land to the higher ground round Thiépval were men of Wiltshire and Worcestershire. They deserve the honour that has been given them by Sir Douglas Haig in his report, because after their great assault they had to sustain last night a strong attack by Prussian Guardsmen, following a long and fierce bombardment. The courage of these English lads—among them being boys who once followed the plough and worked in the orchards of those quiet old counties—did not fail against the finest troops of the Kaiser's armies, and that phrase in the official communiqué which records their achievement is a fine memorial:

"The success of our defences is largely due to the steadiness and determined gallantry of Wiltshire and Worcestershire men, who, in spite of being subjected to a very heavy bombardment, steadily maintained their positions, and repulsed the determined assault of the enemy."

It seems to me probable that the enemy will make a big effort to check our continued advance along the ridge from Thiépval to High Wood, and especially to rescue Thiépval itself from its impending fate. The position our troops have gained by two months' fighting of the most heroic kind has put the enemy at a great disadvantage from the point of view of artillery observation, which is all-important in modern warfare.

On the ground in front of us now, beyond the Windmill and the switch-line, the German battalions are in an untenable position if our attack is pressed on, until they fall back upon what is known as the Flers line, more than 2000 yards behind Martinpuich and High Wood, and meanwhile their present line of defence is open to our bombardments, so that the enemy's casualties must be very heavy, and, as we know, the "moral" of their men in these shell-craters and ruins is badly shaken.

It is obvious that the German Headquarters Staff realizes the gravity of the position, and is endeavouring to organize a method of defence by attack, which will stop or check the British advance. They are probably too shrewd to believe

that this can be done by bringing up fresh troops to replace those who have been worn out, and stand with shattered nerves beyond the British lines.

Fresh troops or old troops are food for our guns, greedy for them. It is only by guns that the enemy can fight against guns, and he is drifting down batteries into a great concentration for the defence of Thiépval.

It will be the greatest duel of artillery ever seen on the British front, for as I have seen myself the sweep and fury of our own shell-fire in the neighbourhood reaches the most astounding intensity. Meanwhile we have in this sector, beyond any shadow of doubt, or exaggeration, the mastery of the air, and that is of supreme advantage to our gunners, and to the infantry who are supported by them.

So far our progress has not been brought to a dead halt, and we have made further ground yesterday, by wonderfully fine fighting on the part of English and Scots battalions, to the north and east of Delville Wood. Our hurricane bombardment preceding the attack of these troops was countered by a heavy barrage from the enemy, but our men went forward with an unflinching spirit to a line striking across the Flers-Longueval road, and joining on the left—by a curved salient—our old position south-west of High Wood.

The hardest part of the fighting was on the left of the attack, where there was a great deal of machine-gun fire, but the enemy's trenches were carried and prisoners were taken to the number of ten officers and 214 other ranks. Several machine-guns also were brought back after being captured by hand-to-hand fighting at the strong points.

9

AUGUST 28

I have already described my own visual impressions of the great assault made south of Thiépval by men of Wiltshire and Worcestershire, which I watched from a neighbouring trench. But there are still things to be told about this memorable achievement—as fine in its way as anything our men have done. The name of Wiltshire will always be specially remembered on the ground of the Leipzig salient, which barred the southern way to Thiépval, for they were troops of this county who, as far back as July 8, captured the butt-end of that strong-

hold, and, working with other county troops on their right, made the next advance, on August 22, which preceded the greater attack two days later.

That affair of August 22 was extraordinarily fine and brief and successful. Twelve minutes after the attacking time, the Wilts men had gone across the one hundred yards of No Man's Land, captured the enemy's nearest line of trenches, and sent down their first batch of twenty prisoners.

The Wiltshires had only three casualties in getting across the open ground, though afterwards suffered more under the enemy's shell-fire. Most of the German dug-outs were blown in, but there was one big subterranean chamber which was not badly damaged, and wanted only a little work to make it a place of comfort for the new-comers. As their colonel said to me to-day: "It always gives us great pleasure to take lodgings in these German apartments."

The attack on the Hindenburg Trench which I saw on August 24 was complicated because the Wiltshires had to advance partly across the open—300 yards of No Man's Land, which is no joke—and partly, on their left, through a network of trenches climbing the high ground from the Leipzig salient to Thiépval.

It was necessary therefore to organize the attack so that those advancing over the open should not arrive at the Hindenburg Trench sooner than those worrying their way up through the broken earthworks, not at all an easy proposition.

Also before the Hindenburg line could be seized securely it would be essential to "kill" a German strong point at a junction made in the Hindenburg Trench by a communication-way running up from the Leipzig salient.

The penalty of not doing so would be certain death to many of our men by an enfilade fire of machine-guns. These are little details that worry the souls of commanding officers and company commanders before they get the men over the parapet with thousands of bombs and the supplies of picks, shovels, sandbags, Lewis-gun "drums," Very lights, and other material of war.

10

On the day before the last attack on the southern way into Thiépval the enemy, who suspected bad things coming, tried to

thwart our plan by hurling a terrific storm of shell-fire all over the Leipzig salient.

He seems to have brought up new guns for the purpose, and his heavy five-point-nines "crumped" the ground in all directions. But all this did not stop the Wiltshires and the Worcesters, who went on with their own little scheme.

On Thursday afternoon last everything went like clockwork from the moment that our artillery opened with the intense bombardment described by me in a former dispatch.

The Worcesters attacked on the right, the Wiltshires on the left. Over the parapet they halted a moment, and then went forward in a steady and ordered way. I could not see the men working up through the trenches on the left until they sprang up to the crest of the ridge, but only those who went across the open. The last eighty yards was covered in the quickest time, and soon after our shell-fire lifted off the German trench the Wiltshires and Worcesters were in among the enemy.

But not close together. There was a gap of fifty yards between the two parties, and in order to get in touch with each other they bombed left and right. It was at this moment that a company officer distinguished himself by great gallantry.

There were Prussian Guards in the trench, and they fought fiercely, using the gap as a bombing centre. Unless routed out this group of men might have spoiled the attack. The officer saw the situation in a flash, and was quick to get a rifle to his shoulder. He was a dead shot, and shot, one after the other, five men who were trying to blow him to bits with their hand-grenades.

At the same time a sergeant scrambled up into the open, and running along outside the trench flung his bombs at the enemy below, "to rattle them," according to the description of his commanding officer. Another young soldier fixed his Lewis gun over the parapet and fired down into the trenches, so that the enemy had to keep quiet until our men were all round them.

The strong point by the Koenigstrasse had been rushed, and the Hindenburg Trench was ours.

11

Sharp and fierce fighting had carried the trenches on the left and captured a strong dug-out belonging to the German company

commanders. Here also the Prussian Guards fought with great courage, firing up from their dug-outs and only surrendering under the menace of immediate death. One sergeant here on the left walked about in the open with a cool courage and shot twelve Germans who were sniping from shell-holes. The ground was already strewn with their dead, killed by our bombardment, and over this graveyard of unburied men there was bayonet fighting and bombing until all the Prussians who remained alive became the prisoners of the Wiltshires.

There were several officers among them wearing the Iron Cross, and all the officers and men were tall fellows with brand-new equipment, which showed that they had just come into the trenches.

Two captured machine-guns were turned against the enemy's line, with their own ammunition ready for use, and both the Wiltshires and the Worcesters settled down in the new line, badly smashed as usual by our shell-fire, but with a lot of useful dug-outs still intact, to hold on under the inevitable retaliation of the enemy's guns.

All through the night there was a steady bombardment, but nothing of extraordinary ferocity. It was the usual night's "strafe" in the neighbourhood of Thiépval, which is not really a nice place.

On the following day—last Friday—the hostile shell-fire increased. Five-point-nines were joined by eight-inchers, and, as one of the officers described it, "every durned thing." It quickened and strengthened in intensity until towards evening it was a hurricane bombardment meaning one obvious thing—a counter-attack. Our men were well down in the old German dug-outs, grateful to their enemy for digging so deep and well, but it became most necessary to warn our "heavies" that the Prussians were gathering for a smashing assault.

Runners were sent out to get back through the barrage if they had the luck, and several of these brave men tried and several failed, dying on the way. But one had more than human luck. Owing to the appalling character of the ground, "pitted and ploughed as though by a gigantic harrow"—it is his officer's phrase—the man lost his sense of direction, staggered and stumbled on through the smoke and over the shell-craters, and then—amazed—found himself looking over a parapet into a trench full of Germans with fixed bayonets. They were

crowded there, those tall Prussians, awaiting the moment to launch their counter-attack.

The runner turned back. Before him the ground was a series of volcanoes, tossed up by German shells and British shells. He knew that he had to pass through our barrage and the enemy's barrage. The chances against him were tremendous. In his own opinion he had no more chance than a "snowflake in hell." But he ran back, dodging this death, and—came through untouched!

The "heavies" did at last get the message and were quick to answer it. "In three shakes," said an officer of the Wiltshires, "they were smashing the German lines to glory."

Those tall Prussians crowding there were caught by this storm. Their trench became a ditchful of mangled bodies. Only a thin wave of men came out into open country, and of these not many went back.

The Prussian counter-attack was killed. The Worcesters and the Wiltshires held their ground round Thiépval, and their losses were paid for heavily by German blood.

XXV

THE LAST FIGHTS IN DEVIL'S WOOD

1

AUGUST 29

THE barren ground of the battlefields was turned into swamps this afternoon, when the clouds which had been piling up in great black masses suddenly broke after a few warning flashes of lightning and a roll of thunder.

I have been watching the usual artillery bombardment over the Pozières Ridge and Thiépval, spreading eastward to the thin fringe of High Wood, faintly pencilled against the darkening sky. The guns quickened their pace at about three o'clock, and on our right the French artillery was also hammering away. Then the storm burst and nature, after all, had the best of it, though all the atmospheric effects seemed like a magnificent plagiarism of our human chemistry which has filled the sky with darkness and forked lightnings, and the earth with high explosives, and the air with noise. These thunder-claps ripping the clouds before the long ruffle of their drums, and the winking of the lightning behind the black curtains on the hills, and the queer, ghastly colours edging fantastically shaped wreaths of cloud, were enormously like our miniature tempests of hate. Nature was at war with itself, and our pop-guns seemed silly toys.

Coming down to earth and its funny ants, called men, there has not been very much activity during the past twenty-four hours beyond the work of the gunners. Between Delville Wood and High Wood our troops captured a German barricade, and there was some bombing about the shell-craters on the way to Ginchy, all of which gives us at last a strong grip all round and beyond that Devil's Wood where our men have fought so often and so hard.

There seems no doubt about it now, judging from all I heard at an officers' mess in a big-sized tent between the bombardment and the thunder-storm, where a number of young officers told me incidents of the recent fighting there.

2

It was on August 24, as I have described already in a brief way, that the big "shove" was made all round this beastly wood and out of it on the east side, where the Germans still had some strong posts and shell-craters and machine-guns.

The troops engaged were mostly of English regiments, with one body of Scots, and they all did splendidly in spite of the tragic character of the ground and the intensity of the enemy's barrage. Accidents happened now and then. At one point of the advance the German wire was uncut, and only eight men could get through. They killed eleven Germans in the craters beyond them, and stayed there till dusk, and came back.

On the north side of the wood the troops were hammered by shell-fire, but "stuck" it out, and went forward marvellously, under the protection of their own shell-fire, while our machine-guns kept the enemy's heads down by a stream of machine-gun bullets—a million of them—which "watered" his trenches.

There was but little hand fighting here. Many Germans were found dead in their muck-heaps which were once trenches. Four of them ran forward to surrender so furiously that they scared one of our men, who ran too, until he realized their intention and took them prisoner. Another came running forward and was seized by the throat by an officer, who was suspicious of his intention in the heat of the moment.

There was also a bull-pup who came over and is now enjoying bully-beef.

Farther on the right there was great fighting to thrust the enemy out of his last ditch in Delville Wood and to get across the ground to the east of it.

The enemy fought with high courage, and there were many bombing duels, in which one of our sergeants caught German bombs before they burst and flung them back again—which is not an easy trick to learn. A Lewis gun was thrust up very

quickly to a German post where a machine-gun was concealed in a shell-crater and played its hose on the team who refused to surrender. Out of one such strong point—a nest of craters—fifty-four Prussians came up with the usual shout of surrender when our bombing parties had surrounded them.

Every man fought with reckless courage. The wounded officers carried back on stretchers brought the latest news to their brigadier, and said, "We're doing jolly well, sir," or explained the difficult bits of work in hand.

The stretcher-bearers went out through the heaviest fire and searched for the wounded with great self-sacrifice. One man of the R.A.M.C. was out there, over this frightful ground, for twenty hours at a stretch, saving many men, untired till the last.

One queer horror was seen. Some German sentries were found tied to posts, and one man stood there without a head, which had been blown off by a shell. It seemed some awful form of field punishment, perhaps for men who had tried to desert. Nearly 400 prisoners were taken altogether that day.

They had fought bravely—once they had the pride of Prussians. But now many of them were utterly broken, and one officer, when he was questioned, could only wring his hands and moan about the awful losses of his company.

It was fighting which continued the tradition of Devil's Wood—where horror and heroism have gone hand in hand.

3

SEPTEMBER 2

The enemy's attempt to recover some of his lost ground around Delville Wood has been very costly to him, and has only succeeded in two places in forcing our men back a little way, in spite of the self-sacrifice of those German soldiers who obeyed orders and came across a foul ground through the curtain-fire of our guns, and fell, as they knew they must fall.

So we go back to Devil's Wood again, and the name of its beastliness must be written down once more as a place where more dead lie among those who have lain there long, and where once more shell-fire is smashing through the charred tree-

stumps and biting great chunks of wood out of sturdy old trunks still standing in this shambles.

It will be remembered, perhaps, how in the last big fighting here more than a week ago our men thrust our lines out beyond the wood, above the orchard trench of Longueval and the sunken road to High Wood, and captured the enemy's last strong point in the north-east corner of the wood, and chased the enemy out of a network of trenches zigzagging away from the wood towards Guinchy. Something like 400 prisoners were taken then, and in knocking out machine-gun posts, in bombing the enemy out of small redoubts, and sweeping across ground pitted with shell-craters in which lay stubborn Germans sniping our men as they passed, every quality of courage and the fighting spirit was shown by our troops engaged.

It was good to get about beyond the Devil's Wood, and our men redug their trenches outside it with a willing industry. Then by bad luck the rain came, and heavy clouds gathered and broke, slashed by lightning, and flooded the battlefields.

It was hard luck on newly made trenches and on the men who had dug them. I think it is difficult for people at home to understand the meaning of big rain in this war of ours; the very sandbags come slipping off the parapets, and parapets come falling on to the firesteps, and rivers come rushing down the boggy ditches.

Rifles drop and get caked with wet mud. Hand-grenades disappear into the quagmire. To get supplies up narrow ditches is tiring to the point of sheer exhaustion. So our men were tired—"fed-up" with the weather, as they would put it—when the enemy began to bombard them, not in the usual way of a war-day's work, but furiously, with a storm of hate.

For three hours the bombardment went on and increased in violence. The front trenches had been lightly held, and the men there held on until there were no trenches, but only shell-craters and a wild upheaval of wet earth. The enemy believed, perhaps, that they had finished all our life in those muck-heaps.

German soldiers ordered to advance may, for a few minutes, have bolstered up their courage by the thought that their guns had done most of the work. Not longer than that. When the first wave of the 118th German regiment came out of their shell-craters and ditches they came full into the face of a

deadly machine-gun fire, and under a great barrage of high explosives.

It was the fire of our machine-gunners which killed most of them. They fell as if swept down by invisible scythes.

The second wave came—not in a standing line, as people may imagine, but in little bunches or groups, and singly, stumbling in and out of shell-holes, in short rushes, leaping to avoid shell-bursts, but not retreating one bit from the death that waited for them. The second German wave was wiped out.

A third, fourth, and fifth wave advanced, and though many of these men fell, and the waves became mingled and confused in their tide, there were enough to reach the place where our lines had been, and too many at the time for our men, who had been sorely tried to dispute the foremost shell-craters with them.

Our troops had to fall back in one or two places along the fringe of Delville Wood and behind the line of the sunken road westward. But the enemy did not gain the ground round the wood. Even where he had damaged our trenches most we held strong posts, machine-guns in convenient shell-holes, and small groups of brave fellows in isolated bits of trench keeping their bombs and rifles dry.

During the night also our men bombed out parties of Germans in a portion of the sunken road, and regained the bit of ground for which the enemy had paid so high a price in blood.

To-day there was a blue sky again over the battlefields, and the sunlight lay over the ghastly ruin of all those villages and woodlands.

A great day for the gunners, O God! . . . They made the most of it, and I watched the bombardment piling up the columns of smoke and earth between Thiépval and High Wood, and a fierce German barrage between Mametz Wood and the Bazentins.

Heavy "crumps" were bursting also away back by Contalmaison, and once the Virgin of Albert was hidden in a smoke-cloud which rose from the ruins about it.

The sun gleamed on all our kite-balloons hastening forward in the blue to watch the enemy's lines. They were dazzling white, these "Ruperts" of the sky, and above and about them flashed our battle-planes going over the enemy's country.

Ceaselessly the infernal clangor of great guns banged over the hills, and the shells went whining overhead. The enemy was getting the worst of it, if I could judge from the greater weight of our bombardment, but his guns were also hard at work, at long range beyond Grandcourt and Flers. He flung out a quantity of gas-shells—and the sun shone down upon all these little busy ways of men, and the fields were flooded with a golden light.

XXVI

THE AUSTRALIANS AT MOUQUET FARM

1

SEPTEMBER 3

TO-DAY, Sunday, September 3, many of our troops have been engaged in hard fighting.

The main facts of these battles will be told officially before what I have to write is published—the capture of Guillemont, the advance at least as far as half-way through the village of Ginchy, the taking of ground eastwards beyond Mouquet Farm—and put even as briefly as that it will be known by people at home that our men have again gone forward in a great attack and fought tremendously.

Again all this countryside above the Somme has been filled with those scenes of war which I have described so often since that morning of July 1 when we began the great attack, pictures of a day of battle when many troops are engaged, and when the power of our artillery is concentrated in a tremendous endeavour—stabs of fire from the muzzles of many guns, smoke-clouds rising above the ridges of the hills and lying dense in the valleys, the bloody trail of the walking wounded, groups of prisoners tramping down, ambulance convoys swirling through quiet lanes, bandaged men in casualty clearing-stations or sitting in harvest-fields behind the lines waiting for the Red Cross trains, guns going up, ammunition columns crawling forward, transport, mules, motor-cars, field-guns, troops—everywhere the movement of a great day of war.

2

Looking back on to-day's battle-pictures two of them rise before me now as I write, most vividly. One of them was just

a smoke-picture as I stared down into the boiling heart of its cauldron this morning. I was in an artillery observation-post, from which on ordinary days one may see each shell burst above the ruins of Thiépval and the ragged trees of its woods and the broken row of apple-trees, and a charred stick or two of Mouquet Farm, and beyond, very clearly on the ridge, the conical base of the windmill above Pozières.

To-day one could see nothing of this. Nothing at all but a hurly-burly of smoke, black rising in columns through white white floating through and above black, and all moving and writhing. That was where our men were fighting.

That was all the picture of this struggle, just smoke and mist. Thousands of shells were bursting there, but one could see no separate shell-burst; no single human figure dodging death or meeting it. So I stood and stared and listened. It was like a world in conflict.

The noise of the guns was tense. The hammer-strokes of each explosion met each other stroke, and gave out an enormous clangor. Dante looking down into Inferno may have seen something like this, and would not have heard such a noise. It was most like the spirit of war of anything I have seen, and I have seen men go forward and fall, and watched their single adventures.

The other picture was more human and less frightful, though sad and tragic and wonderful. It was a field behind the battle-lines, into which the "walking wounded" first came down after their escape from those fires farther up. It was a harvest-field with rows of neat corn-stooks near a wood in heavy foliage, in spite of shells which came from time to time to break the branches. Some wounded men lay about on the stubble. Others came limping between the corn-stooks, with their arms about the necks of stronger comrades.

Horse ambulances halted by the side of the road, and groups of Red Cross men ran forward and brought back very slowly stretchers heavily laden with human bundles, who were laid by the side of those who could sit up with their backs to the wheat-sheaves. Many of the men's faces were caked with blood. There was every kind of wound except the worst. But men with bandaged heads called out to others who came with their arms in slings, and men gone lame gossiped with men whose jackets had been cut away at the shoulder—and

I saw again the wonder that one always sees after battle, which is the cheerfulness of men who are not too far gone to hide their pain, the courage of the British soldier, which is sublime.

There were a few men there from whom one's eyes played the coward, but it was good to see the happiness of those who had come out of the zone of death into this harvest-field, where there was safety except for chance shells. Guns were firing all round them. But they were our guns. These men were the heroes of a great day of battle, and they had been touched by fire, but had not been burnt in the furnaces to which they had gone before the dawn. They had had all the luck.

3

It is too soon to tell the story of this day. Our men are still fighting as the sun goes down this evening with a red glow in the sky after a sharp burst of rain. In those wet and broken ditches, which we call trenches, north-east beyond Mouquet Farm, and on the right by Guillemont, the enemy is still being routed out of shell-craters and trying to rally to counter-attacks, and the German guns are flinging out barrages to drive our men back if they can. At this hour, when all is confused and uncertain except the main facts that we have taken Guillemont and part of Ginchy, and far beyond Mouquet, with great news from the French on our right—the capture of Cléry and 1500 prisoners—I can give only a few glimpses of the incidents of all this fighting.

On the left our attack was made on the German lines north and south of the Ancre. Our troops went over their parapets this morning almost before the first glimmer of dawn had lightened the sky. They could only see the ground immediately before them, and it was, of course, pitted with shell-craters, old and new. The new craters had just been made by our hurricane bombardment, which had laid the enemy's parapets in shapeless ruin, killing a great number of Germans in what had been their trenches. Their light signals called to their gunners, and at the very instant our men came into the open an accurate barrage swept our lines. But the men were away, and as far as I heard from them this morning the line on the left did not suffer uncommonly in the scramble across No Man's Land.

A number of them forced their way into and through the enemy's first and second lines, bayoneting the Germans who tried to resist them, and clearing the ground of strong snipers and machine-gunners. They fought—these English country fellows—in heroic style to the south of the river. The enemy's machine-gunners played an enfilade fire upon the successful troops across the Ancre, and the enemy's artillery was able to concentrate on this ground. Ours held on to the German second line against this overwhelming fire with a most stubborn endurance, but afterwards when a body of Prussians advanced to a counter-attack drew back to get into line again with the men on their right, south of the river.

"It was the shell-fire which made our position untenable," said one of the officers who had been fighting here. "But in any case we put a large number of Boches out of action, and that is always worth doing, and brings the end of the war a little closer."

4

Much more lucky and valuable was the advance made by Australian troops upon Mouquet Farm. These men knew the ground intimately, and had already penetrated the ruins of the farm by a strong patrol, which went in and out some days ago, bringing back some prisoners, as I described at the time. They were confident that they could do the same thing again, though the site of the farm might be difficult to hold against hostile fire. Our guns did not fail them this morning.

One of these clean-cut Australian boys with those fine, steady, truth-telling eyes which look so straight at one even after a nerve-breaking ordeal of fire, told me to-day that the bombardment preceding their attack was the greatest thing he has ever heard, though he has fought under many of them hereabouts.

"Our shells rushed over us," he said, "with a strange, loud, ringing noise which pierced one's ear-drums with a violent vibration. It was just marvellous." But the enemy's guns were powerful too, and he replied tremendously as soon as our own "lifted" and lengthened their fuses.

The way across No Man's Land, which was about 200 yards, I think, was a passage perilous. There was no level ground anywhere, not a foot of it. It was all shell-holes. Our men

fell in and scrambled out and fell in again. Some of the holes were full of water and mud, and men plunged up to their armpits and were bogged.

There was nothing in the way of trenches to take. The Germans were holding lines of shell-craters. In these deep pits they had fixed their machine-guns, and were scattered all about in isolated groups, with little stores of bombs, and rifles kept dry somehow. It was extraordinarily difficult to attack such a position because there was no definite line.

The Australians found themselves sniped by machine-guns—horrible little spasms of bullets—from unknown quarters, to the right and left, even behind them. By the time the line of Mouquet Farm was reached the battle was broken up into a number of separate encounters between small parties of Australians and small parties of Prussians.

There were bombing duels between one man and another over a shell-hole. Prussians sniped Australians and Australians Prussians at short range from the cover of craters.

But in spite of all this hugger-mugger fighting the Australians pushed forward, and advanced parties went into Mouquet Farm and 200 yards beyond it on the other side. Mouquet Farm—or " Moo-cow " and " Muckie " Farm, as it is variously called—only exists as a name. Of the farm buildings there is nothing left but some blackened beams no higher than one of the Australian boys.

The enemy, however, had his usual dug-outs here, tunnelled deep and strongly protected with timbers and cement. Into one of these went a group of Australians, ready for a fight, and were surprised to find the place empty of human life. It was quiet there out of the shell-fire, and it was pleasant to be in the cool dark room, away from the battle. The men searched about and found cigars, which they lit and smoked.

" Good work ! " said a boy.

As he spoke the words there was a scuttle of feet and dark figures appeared in the entranceway. They were Germans, and an officer among them said : " Surrender ! " " Surrender be damned ! " shouted the Australians. " Surrender yourselves."

Bombs were flung on both sides, but other Australians came up, and it was the Germans who surrendered. I saw one of them to-day, sitting on the grass and smoking a pipe among

some of his comrades, who lay wounded among the men who had helped to capture them.

Other dug-outs were being searched, and other prisoners were taken—how many is still uncertain. But what is quite certain is that the Australians have taken ground beyond Mouquet Farm to the east and defeated Germany's best troops—the 1st Regiment of the Prussian Guards Reserve.

They were sturdy and fine-looking men, as I saw some of them to-day, and they did not hide their joy at being alive and well treated as wounded prisoners. One of them spoke quite freely, and answered all questions put to him, though with what truth it is difficult to judge.

I think he told the truth, according to the knowledge that had been given to him and the lessons taught him by his war lords. One of his most startling statements, which he made quite definitely, is that the German Emperor has issued a proclamation to his troops, declaring that there will be no winter campaign.

With regard to the coming in of Rumania, he said that it did not surprise them, as they had expected it for a long time. "It will make no difference to the real war," he said. He disclaimed that there was any shortage of food in Germany, and as for the soldiers, said: "At least the Prussian Guards feed well. I had two eggs for breakfast. It is the same with all our men."

In the captured districts of France, the French people, he says, live on good terms with the Prussian soldiers, but do not like the Bavarians, who are rude fellows. "They were glad to see us back from Russia," he added.

They seem to have been brought back hurriedly from Russia to resist our offensive, and one man to whom I spoke a few words—a house-painter in Berlin in days of peace—told me that he had only been here in France since the early days of July. He said that the war was far worse in France than in Russia, because of the intensity of artillery fire. "We are weary of it all," he said. "Our people are weary of it. The world is weary of it."

"And you are glad to be out of it?" I asked.

He smiled, and said, "It is good to be here."

The Australians were giving their tobacco to these men, and there was no sign of hatred between them. It seems that

the Prussian Guard behaved well to-day with regard to the wounded and the stretcher-bearers. After the battle the bearers went out all across No Man's Land to rescue the wounded and we allowed the same privilege to the enemy, so that parties of Germans and British came close to each other in this work of rescue, and there was no sniping.

With regard to the Guillemont fighting I can write very little, as the battle there began only at midday and I could not get in that direction. But I learn that in co-operation with the French, who were advancing magnificently from the south, and who had linked up with us near Angle Wood, our troops fought their way forward from Arrow Head Copse by way of a maze of little saps which had been dug all about here. They went straight through Guillemont, knocking out machine-gun posts and clearing out dug-outs, and established themselves on the Sunken Road from Ginchy. The Prussian Guard put up a big fight near Falfemont Farm, but suffered great losses. The other German regiments against us were the 73rd, 76th, and 164th.

Fighting still goes on, and the exact issue is uncertain, but at the end of this Sunday the advantage of the day lies with us, and the enemy has submitted to heavy blows.

XXVII

THE CAPTURE OF GUILLEMONT

I

SEPTEMBER 4

IN my dispatch yesterday describing the very heavy fighting at several parts of the line, I was unable to give sufficient prominence to the greatest success of the day, and one of the best achievements since the beginning of the battles of the Somme.

That we hold Guillemont safely and surely I had the luck to see for myself to-day when from neighbouring trenches I looked into the ruin of the place—strangely quiet this afternoon apart from a few German " crumps "—and saw that our men were holding the Sunken Road 500 yards farther on before they made an attack which has given us Wedge Wood and ground to the north of Falfemont Farm.

Yesterday's attack at midday was wonderfully good. Our men went forward steadily in waves after a hurricane fire from a great mass of British guns. By some curious chance the enemy does not seem to have expected an attack at the exact hour it happened. They may have thought that they had baulked it by their own bombardment on our lines and behind them when they flung over 10,000 gas-shells, whose poisonous vapour floated over the ground for hours. They know now to their cost that they did not thwart the advance of our troops.

The enemy's machine-guns swept the ground with a rush of bullets, but our men took cover as much as possible in the dips and hollows of the earth—chaotic after long weeks of shelling—and came along quite quickly to the outskirts of the ruined village. A quarry there, in the centre of the western edge, had been entered and held for a day or two by British troops, but it was no longer in our hands and had to be retaken.

On the edge of the village also, on the western and southern sides, the Germans had built their best dug-outs, months ago, before our guns concentrated their fire here, so that they had plenty of time to build them deep and build them strong, to panel them, and roof them with concrete, and to furnish them comfortably, and to decorate them with pictures from German newspapers and post cards from home.

Our assaulting troops were in and about those dug-outs in the first wave, and halted here to see that no enemies should remain in hiding to attack them from the rear. Underground there was not much fighting. A few proud men refused to surrender, or did not surrender quickly enough. Most of them gave themselves up easily and gave no trouble in being marshalled back, so that something like 600 men belonging to the finest German troops are now behind our lines—out of it for good, and rejoicing in their luck of life.

Half an hour afterwards, joined by supporting troops, the British line advanced to the Sunken Road, where other German soldiers were captured, and found here a fine defensive position all ready for them, after a little work in reorganizing the shelter.

From that point a number of men went forward again to an attack on Falfemont Farm, but this was too far for one day's work, and they were held on the outskirts of the wood—poor wood of "strafed" trees!—by an immediate counter-attack from the Prussian Guard. For one of the rare times in this war the Germans faced British bayonets, and stood to their ground so stoutly that they were able to maintain their position.

So the battle ended yesterday with the capture of Guillemont, which was good enough, and our line strongly entrenched along the Sunken Road.

2

To-day I saw another attack upon Falfemont Farm and our capture of the Wedge Wood. Everywhere along the way which leads to the country between Hardecourt and Maurepas there is a great desolation.

The Sunken Road led down from Guillemont to Wedge Wood in the hollow. British soldiers held the Sunken Road, Germans were in Wedge Wood.

Striking up from that small solitary copse of naked sticks were two white chalky trenches in an obtuse angle with the

apex nearest to Wedge Wood and the broad base up the sloping ground towards Leuze Wood on the ridge above. And half-way down the slope to the right of the triangle trenches was Falfemont Farm, without a sign of a farm, but marked by a number of tree-stems stuck up like telephone-poles.

A little after three o'clock in the afternoon I saw our men in the open. They came up suddenly, as though by a spellword, along the line of the Sunken Road and southwards below Falfemont Farm, advancing northwards to that place.

The men advanced in waves. I saw the left waves surging down into Wedge Wood. Some of them wavered a little, then fell. Groups fell, not dead or wounded, but getting below the stream of bullets yard-high over the ground. The small copse was soon crowded with British soldiers. They seemed to be in a kind of scrimmage, and out of the middle of it came presently a compact little body of men.

"German prisoners, right enough—and well done!" said an officer by my side.

I followed the advance of the southern waves towards Falfemont Farm. They went on slowly and steadily, and had a long way to go. It seemed to me a frightful long way. But they crept up nearer and nearer to the edge of the bare poles which were once a wood. Then some of them fell, and disappeared into shell-craters and broken trenches. New waves came up and disappeared also, as though lying, or dead, in the tall thistles. After a little while I saw that many of them had reappeared to the left. They were working up towards the German triangle trenches on the slope of the spur, striking down from Leuze Wood.

In a few minutes two figures appeared black against the white chalk of the first trench, and presently they were lost in it. But not for long. Groups of them were up again, marshalling another group which seemed separated from them and then moved back towards Wedge Wood. I guessed they were more German prisoners, but could not see the difference between grey and khaki.

"Hallo, they've got the second trench!" said another man by my side.

It was some time after two, while I was watching the confused groups of men, that strange things began to happen in the

German lines. From Leuze Wood parties of men came running down to Falfemont Farm.

"By the Lord!" said an officer. "A German counter-attack. . . . Get it over the telephone, quick. A good target for the guns."

It was a wonderful target. The Prussian Guardsmen came forward, not in open order, but shoulder to shoulder. They made a serpentine line across the ground, advancing steadily and not slowly towards our troops. They looked very tall men, and their figures were quite black against the chalky earth. Then suddenly the right end of the line crumbled away. Gaps opened in the thick bar of men. Our machine-guns were raking them. I listened to the swish-swish of the fire, like a flame blown in the wind. Then, like a row of ninepins on uneven ground, the Prussian Guards all fell face forwards. The unwounded men had fallen with the wounded to escape our bullets.

"Counter-attack repulsed!" said a voice near the telephonist.

Twenty minutes later, if I remember accurately, another German counter-attack was organized in exactly the same way, by parties of men coming down from Leuze Wood. But this was also broken up by our machine-gun fire.

3

September 5

My last dispatch describing the capture of Wedge Wood and the attack on Falfemont Farm left off like a serial story at a moment of exciting uncertainty. It was impossible for me to tell whether our men had actually taken possession of the farm—that plantation of "strafed" trees to the south of Leuze Wood—and the meaning of all that coming and going of groups and individuals to the west and north of it, after the second German counter-attack had failed.

Now the tangled web of the plot—not spun by imagination but as real as death—is straightened out, and the end of another grim little chapter of the war is the capture of 1000 yards of the enemy's front, to the depth of 1500 yards, in and around Falfemont Farm, which is now held by British troops.

It was great fighting which gained this ground, and the men were their own generals. These West-country lads were not

moved like marionettes pulled by the strings from headquarters. It was, after the first orders had been given, a soldiers' battle, and its success was due to young officers and N.C.O.'s and men using their own initiative, finding another way round when one had failed, and arranging their own tactics in face of the enemy to suit the situation of the moment.

Such a thing has been done very rarely since the first days of trench warfare, except in raids over No Man's Land and bombing fights in such places as Ovillers and Longueval. Here the individual craft of our men gained an important position. When the attack on Falfemont Farm was checked on the south by wicked machine-gun fire our troops worked their way westwards, and joining other bodies of men advancing from the Sunken Road beyond Guillemont, crept round the slope of the ground that goes up to Leuze Wood.

Half-way up, on the outer edge of the spur, were the two V-shaped trenches which I saw taken by the first two waves, immediately after the capture of Wedge Wood, in the hollow at the bottom of the Sunken Road, and these trenches were used also as good cover for men inspired by a great idea.

It was the idea of making a surprise rush into Leuze Wood, from its western side, while the enemy's attention was directed to the defence of Falfemont Farm, half-way down the slope to the south.

It was this surprise movement which caused all the confusion which I saw yesterday among the enemy.

Splendid work was done by our men after dusk and during the night, in spite of a deluge of rain, when the enemy's artillery fired most furiously. By dawn more troops had joined those who held the spur and pushed on to the north of Falfemont Farm, and others had got close to the farm on the south and west by way of Wedge Wood.

Between the black posts which were once high living trees about sixty Germans stayed on in their shell-craters and broken dug-outs. When the final British rush came from three sides they could do nothing but surrender or die. Some of them died, and others lay wounded and unconscious, but most of them put their hands up, and this afternoon I saw some of the wounded Germans from Falfemont lying side by side on stretchers with boys from the West Country who had been hit in attacking them.

From first to last it was the work of infantry rather than guns, and it was a great and terrible moment when the Germans came out in their first counter-attack, in close ranks, moving very steadily against our men, in a long, black, undulating wave over the rise and fall of the ground, through the waist-high weeds; and then, again, after this first advance had been broken by our machine-gun fire and had fallen prone into the tall thistles so that no more of them was to be seen, when another body of big Germans came out, crouching for the last rush upon our lines, and our men fell back a little, and opened out, so that the machine-guns had a clear field upon which to play their hose of bullets.

For a little while at least it was fighting without the usual massacre of shell-fire from long-range guns which annihilate the human element as well as the bodies of men. Here at least, in spite of the machine-guns, men looked into each other's eyes and were killed advancing in the sight of their enemies, which seems to me better and less frightful than when men go forward and see nothing and are swallowed up in a great explosion directed from machines six miles away.

The gun-fire was intense afterwards, and men and masses of men were swallowed up as usual by its high explosives, but for a couple of hours it was more like old-fashioned fighting, damnable enough, God knows, but not so utterly inhuman.

4

It is not sufficiently realized, I believe, how very important has been the gain to us of the last two days of battle. The capture of Guillemont and of the ground beyond it has given us now the whole of the German second line, which we broke in parts on the great day of July 14.

Since then our men have had an uphill fight all the time, a long struggle upwards to seize the high ridge from Pozières eastwards, and to hold it. It has been difficult to take and difficult to hold. The cost has not been light. The heroism shown on those slopes, in those woods, in the assault on the high trenches, has been the most wonderful ever shown by British soldiers in continuous endeavour.

Now we have gained the crest of the ridge, and even if our offensive were brought to a dead halt to-day, which it will not

be, the position of our men for the winter would be enormously superior over that of the enemy on the other side of the watershed. Again, the taking of Guillemont and the ground by Ginchy has defended our right flank and straightened out an awkward salient.

With Ginchy in our hands on one side and Thiépval on the other, we should be well placed, and there would be a great gain for all the sacrifice our men have made in fighting forward so hard, and so far, and with such exalted courage.

5

SEPTEMBER 5

The taking of Guillemont, the quick progress to the Sunken Road beyond, the capture of Falfemont Farm, the thrust forward, by great daring, into Leuze Wood, the close assault on Ginchy, and the splendid advance of the French on our right, have given to this part of the battle-line an atmosphere of exultation, which our troops have not felt so strongly since that day of July 14 when we broke the second German line at Longueval. Men are fighting hereabouts with a sense of victory which is half the battle. They feel, rightly or wrongly, that they have the German on the run at last, and that by getting hard on to him, taking all risks, they will keep him running.

The rapid and far progress of the French is helping our own men, not only in a military way by "keeping the Boche busy," as they put it, but as a moral tonic, showing that the German strength of resistance has began to crack. The noise of the French guns is wonderful music to British soldiers going forward to their own part of the battlefields, and, by Jove, it is astounding in its uproar, as I heard it to-day again on our right, away down to the gates of Péronne in a great roll of drum-fire for miles. It is one ceaseless tattoo of "soixante-quinze" and of heavier guns, like a titanic hammering of anvils in the smithies of the gods or devils.

"Hark at them! They seem to be getting on with it all right," said an English officer to-day, and listening for a moment to the great sweep of the artillery battle—for our own guns were firing steadily and tremendously—he added that "The enemy is having a really thick time. We are getting on top at last."

It is this sense of "getting on top" that is inspiring our men to fight to the last ounce of strength on this right wing of our attack, up to Ginchy and beyond Guillemont. It is literally as well as morally a desire to get on top, up the hill to the crest of the ridge, to the last vantage-point of the enemy, and it it to push him off and over that high point that our men have been fighting uphill with a really passionate endeavour.

They got all round the place a few days ago after hard, bloody fighting. They held on under great shell-fire and machine-gun fire, and many men took the last hazard in trying to force their way into the stronghold where the enemy is entrenched and covered with well-placed machine-guns. Some of them went in, and stayed in. No message has come back from them, but it is quite likely that they are still there as a living wedge in the enemy's gates.

One party, thirty strong, fought their way along a sap to the north of the village and established a bombing-post which they held against all odds. Their rations gave out, but they would not go. They had no water, and suffered horribly from thirst, but not a man would go. Their ammunition was nearly spent, but they waited for new supplies, if they should have the luck to get them. A sergeant came back to the front trench with this tale of stubborn courage, and a request for food and water and bombs so that the thirty might still "carry on." That is the spirit with which our men are fighting, and one marvels at them.

The enemy has suffered heavily against these assaults, and our shell-fire has massacred many of his troops. A German officer brought back from the outskirts of Ginchy yesterday was asked what casualties he had in his company. He said, "Oh, a few. Not many." He turned away and tried to destroy a scrap of paper in his hand, but was not quick enough. It was a message calling urgently for rescue and saying that his men were unable to hold out any longer, as there were only twenty of them left out of the full strength of his company.

To-day other British troops have forced their way into the stronghold, but as yet it is too soon to know whether they can maintain their position. The enemy is fighting bravely, but however long his resistance may be, I have no doubt that Ginchy will be added to the list of all those strongholds which have fallen one after another under our repeated assaults. For

Ginchy must be ours to give us the end of the ridge and to link up the line with Leuze Wood, where at present our men are exposed to flanking attacks.

6

The difficulty of all this close and open fighting, where bodies of British troops press on to the very edge of the enemy's ditches, and where bodies of Germans hold bits of roadway bits of trench in isolated positions, is that the guns on both sides cannot concentrate a heavy barrage without killing their own men. In this kind of situation the German gunners are ruthless, but sometimes that method does not pay.

In spite of all their skill—for they are good gunners, these Germans—they were scared enough to withdraw their field-batteries to a safer distance before our final attack on Guillemont last Sunday. Some of our officers fighting here told me that there were very few "whizz-bangs" about that day, and it was all shell-fire from heavy long-range guns.

Before our attack they opened an intense bombardment upon Trônes Wood. It smashed in steady lines of shells—the great five-point-nines—right through the wood, and was maintained mercilessly for many hours. Some of our men behind the front lines had escapes from death which seem like miracles. One young officer I know received an invitation to tea at a dug-out a few hundred yards, I reckon, from his own hole in the earth where he lay with two comrades. It was a pleasant and friendly idea, that cup of tea, but he decided against it when he heard the awful crash of shells outside.

Later a message came that he must go on a matter of business. It was his duty to go, and so he went as fast as possible. A moment or two after reaching the other dug-out there was the tinkle of a telephone bell, and he heard that both his comrades had been killed by the direct hit of a five-point-nine. He went back with a soldier to see if there was any hope for his friends —one of them might be wounded only—and as he went a shell exploded a yard or two away, the man by his side was killed, and his shoulder was splashed with the man's blood, but he was left unscathed.

Our bombardment before the attack on Guillemont was more effective. There were not many Germans here or in the

Sunken Road, or higher up in the trenches by Ginchy, who had miraculous escapes. They were killed in masses. A great number of dead were found by our men outside Guillemont in the Sunken Road, which was the German third line of defence there. They were a frightful sight, as many of them were quite naked, all their clothes having been stripped off by the blasting force of high explosives. Some men, untouched by fragments of shell, were killed by the enormous concussion of air or by heart-shock, and there was one dead man kneeling, and still grasping his rifle with fixed bayonet.

The successful attack on Guillemont was due to the effect of our shell-fire on the garrison. When the infantry advanced they met with but little hostile machine-gun fire. Most of the Germans were dazed and done. They had no alertness left in them to bring up their weapons and resist the attack. Even many of the dug-outs were blown in. A sergeant of one of the companies who came up in support—one of those splendid N.C.O.'s to whom the steadiness of our troops is largely due—told me to-day that he went into one deep dug-out where forty men were lying. Only three were alive, and of those two were badly wounded. In other dug-outs there were many dead.

This was in the Sunken Road, where afterwards our men "organized" the bank, digging themselves in so as to get cover from the heavy barrage flung upon them by the German artillery after the capture of the position. A lance-corporal was killed here by the side of my sergeant friend, who buried him where he fell. And another shell killed six men in a heap just as these troops were relieved and went back for a little while into the support lines. They, too, were buried by another lance-corporal who volunteered to go back for the purpose, and went under heavy shell-fire to do this last service to good comrades.

Lord, how many stories of this kind I have told! The spirit of our men in these hideous places and in these frightful hours is always the same, indomitable and unbroken by the worst ordeals.

7

SEPTEMBER 9

The first mention that the Irish troops were fighting at Guillemont has been made officially, and it is now possible for

me to write about them in more detail. Their charge through Guillemont last Sunday, with English battalions of riflemen on their right, was one of the most astonishing feats in the war, almost too fast in its impetuosity. They went forward with their pipes playing them on, in a wild and irresistible assault.

If there had been three times the number of enemy against them they would not have been checked until they had carried the northern part of the ruined waste that was once a village. The English troops who fought with them tell me that they have never seen anything like the way in which these Irishmen dashed ahead. "It was like a human avalanche," said one of them.

The officers cheered their men on as they came alongside. One of their commanding officers, following the last across, picked up pieces of chalk and threw them after his men, shouting good luck to them. They stormed the first, second, and third German lines through the upper part of the village, sweeping all resistance away, and not stopping to take breath. They were men uplifted, out of themselves, "fey," as the Scots would call it.

Death had no terror for them, nor all the dead men who lay in their way. After months of dull and dogged fighting in the trenches, where they were restless in their ditches, they were excited at getting out into the open and meeting the enemy face to face. It was not good to be a German in their way.

The only fault with this fighting at Guillemont was the rapidity of pace, which gave them no time to safeguard the ground behind them. But that was a fault due to the splendour of their gallantry, and no harm came from it. The English riflemen who fought on their right had more solidity in their way of going about the business, but they were so inspired by the sight of the Irish dash and by the sound of the Irish pipes that those who were in support, under orders to stand and hold the first German line, could hardly be restrained from following on.

"I nearly blew my teeth out of my head in whistling 'em back," said an English sergeant. But discipline prevailed.

The whole attack from first to last was a model of efficiency, organization, and courage. All the qualities that go to the making of victory were here, fitting in with each other, balancing each other, making a terrific weapon driven by a high spirit.

The artillery was in perfect union with the infantry—the most difficult thing in war—the brigadiers and the officers carried out the general plan to the letter, and the men—it is impossible to overpraise the men, who were wonderful in courage and wonderful in discipline.

8

"As far as the English battalions were concerned they were recruited since the first phase of the war, but as one of their officers—once of the Guards—told me yesterday, there are no regular soldiers, no soldiers of any army in the world, who could have attacked in a finer and more disciplined way than these young riflemen, as cold as ice in self-control, but on fire with the resolve to win. The first rush of Irish on the left went over, as I have said, playing their pipes—old songs of victory which could be heard through the swish of machine-gun bullets and the crash of the German "crumps."

The assaulting troops on the right went more quietly, and at the first short halt to wait for the barrage of our guns, which was smashing ahead of them, lit their cigarettes, and then went on again with their rifles slung, as though marching on a field-day.

"Where's that village we've got to take?" they shouted, staring at a choppy sea of shell-craters, where there was hardly a stick or a stone.

I have already described the assault on the first lines, where our men found many German dead. But strange things happened between the first and second lines. The Irish on the left, who had gone so quickly forward in their great "hooroosh," had failed to clear up all the dug-outs as they went.

Some of the Germans there climbed out and began sniping in the rear. It was a dangerous menace, but with quick judgment the colonel of an English battalion on the right diverted five of his platoons to that direction, and they searched all the dug-outs and broke up the enemy's attempt to rally.

One dug-out near the quarry at the central entrance of Guillemont was discovered by a young gunner officer, who had come down behind the advancing infantry "just to look round," as he puts it, after he had done his work with some sixty-pounder plum-pudding bombs from a neighbouring

position. With him was his corporal and one or two other men of the trench-mortar battery.

In looking round he discovered a slit in the rock, which seemed to lead down into an underground chamber, and having explored it came down into a deep place where twenty German soldiers and one officer were hiding. It was a surprise, but he held his revolver ready and said "Hands up!" They surrendered quietly, clicking their heels together and saluting, after they had been searched for arms, and the officer, who was a polite fellow, offered the corporal a valuable gold watch as a souvenir of the occasion.

That was one little adventure on the edge of things. Farther forward each man was in the middle of a great adventure, gruesome and full of peril. An enveloping movement was being made by English troops to the south-west of the village, on the choppy ground on which Guillemont once stood, and it was here that most opposition was encountered, between two sunken roads. In the second sunken road, where the enemy had a row of strong dug-outs, the ground was thick with huddled dead.

But from the dug-outs a large number of living men who climbed on to the parapet in front of them maintained a fusillade of rifle-fire and bombs. In the ground between the two Sunken Roads men climbed half-way out of shell-craters and sniped our men as they came forward. At the same time machine-gun fire was coming down from Ginchy and up from Falfemont Farm. It was difficult ground to cover, but our riflemen ignored the bullets and the bombs and went straight forward, halting only to fire, and then going on again, and firing again, as though on manœuvres.

Some Lewis gunners ran forward and played a hose of bullets upon the enemy's parapet, so that the men dropped. Some of our own men had fallen too, but the wounded crawled into shell-holes to get out of the way, and shouted, "Go on, boys!" or just crawled in silently and uncomplainingly, not asking for help however bad their wounds.

Then the Germans started running and our men went after them. One fellow flung off his pack and chased one of them until he had him by the neck. A German officer who surrendered threw up his hands and said, "If you run like that you'll be in Berlin before we're in England." There were 150 dead in one part

of the Sunken Road and the dug-outs were crowded. Into one of them a smoke-bomb was thrown to tease the men out, but they would not come. Then a Mills bomb was flung in as a stronger argument, but before it exploded it was flung back again. After that the Germans retreated through a tunnel and ran out at another exit, where they were taken prisoner. Twenty-five of them were put into a shell-crater under guard of one little rifleman, who strutted up and down in a German helmet with his bayonet high above his head and a pride twice as high as his bayonet.

In one dug-out, as I wrote in my first narrative, there were forty-one bodies, of whom only three were alive, and those were weeping. All the prisoners, of whom there were about 600, were in a pitiful condition, as our artillery-fire had prevented them from getting any rations for three days. Their spirit was broken and they were trembling with fear.

9

In our dug-outs farther back were three officers, one of whom, a young captain, was clearly in command of the whole garrison of Guillemont, and afterwards, when he passed the prisoners' cage behind the lines, all the men sprang up and saluted him with profound respect. He was the only man who maintained a proud indifference at the moment of capture. He stood very straight and still, as though not caring whether he lived or died. The two officers with him clung about the necks of our own officers crying for mercy. In another place an officer fell down on his knees with his hands in an attitude of prayer and his head bowed, and one man pulled out a photograph of his wife and children, holding that out as his strongest plea for life. Our men had no thought to take their lives. As one of the sergeants said to me, " As soon as a man surrenders it's an end of the fight, and I'm sorry for him."

It was hard for some of our men to be sorry for the enemy in those wild moments about the dug-outs, for some of them flung bombs until the last yard had been covered by our troops, then disappeared into their holes and came up farther away with an air of innocence and meekness. In one or two bad cases of fighting after a sign of surrender it was the authority of the British officers which saved the lives of German soldiers standing by.

But on the whole the prisoners were well-behaved and very glad to get away from the horror of Guillemont, grateful for being given the chance of life. One sergeant of ours, hit in the hip by a piece of shell, captured four men without help, and then ordered them to carry him back on a stretcher to the dressing-station, where he arrived, smoking a cigarette, with his prisoner stretcher-bearers.

Words can convey very little of all those scenes in Guillemont —the isolated fights, the storming of dug-outs, the searching of prisoners, the crowds of British soldiers moving forward to new lines behind our terrific curtain-fire, the Lewis gunners rushing through with their machine-guns to take up positions at advanced points, the supporting and consolidating troops coming up behind the assaulting troops, starting to dig as soon as the ground had been gained, the stretcher-bearers rummaging about among the shell-craters for stricken men, the walking wounded making their way back across the rough ground, dazed, and sometimes falling not to rise again, the cheers of men taking the last Sunken Road to the east of Guillemont, where they consolidated a defensive position for the night, the wild music of the Irish pipers, the crash of German shells, the high whine of German shrapnel, the long rush of our heavies passing overhead to "Lousy" Wood, and, in the midst of all this tumult, the quiet dead.

10

In quiet heroism, of the suffering and not of the fighting kind, it seems to me that the finest thing was done by a wounded man. That at least is the opinion of a commanding officer who met him on his way. His face had been terribly smashed by a piece of shell, but he waved back the stretcher-bearers with a sign that others needed carrying more than he did. Then, a solitary and ghastly figure, he walked back to the dressing-station and laid himself down.

Of the German garrison of 2000 men hardly one escaped. The figure has been accounted for in dead, wounded, and prisoners. Two German battalions have thus been wiped out. Among them were men who wear the word "Gibraltar" on their shoulder-straps, belonging to the famous Hanoverian regiment which fought side by side with us on the Rock in the eighteenth century.

It was after the battle that our men suffered most, for during the next forty-eight hours there were violent storms, which filled the shell-craters with water so that men were up to their shoulders in it. But they had dug magnificently before the rain came, under the inspiration of a splendid colonel, who cried, "Dig, dig, for God's sake! Dig, my lads!" knowing that he would save their lives by every foot of earth turned up by the German shovels they used for the work. In three hours they had dug an eight-foot trench in the village.

So Guillemont was taken and held, not only by great gun-fire but by men inspired with some spirit beyond their ordinary courage, and one day these troops will carry the name upon their colours, so that the world may remember.

XXVIII

THE IRISH AT GINCHY

SEPTEMBER 10

THE capture of Ginchy by the Irish Brigades should be told not in journalist's prose but in heroic verse. Poor Ireland will weep tears over it, for many of her sons have fallen, but there will be pride also in the heart of the Irish people, because these men of Munster, Dublin, and Connaught, and of all parts of the west and the south have done such splendid things in courage and endurance, adding a very noble episode to the history of the Celtic race.

When they came out of the battle this morning they were weary and spent, and they had left many good comrades behind them, but the spirit of the war sustained them, and they came marching steadily with their heads held high. It was one of the most moving things I have ever seen in this war.

A great painter would have found here a subject to thrill his soul, that long trail of Irish regiments, horribly reduced by their losses, and with but few officers to lead them, coming across a stretch of barren country strewn with the wreckage of two years' bombardment, and crowded with the turmoil of the present fighting.

Behind them arose the black curtain of smoke across the battlefields through which there came the enormous noise of the unending gun-fire, and around them were some of our own batteries hard at work with great hammer-strokes as their shells went on their way to the enemy's lines, but ahead of them walked one Irish piper playing them home to the harvest-fields of peace with a lament for those who will never come back.

A brigadier came riding over the fields to meet them. It was the first time he had seen them together since the early dawn of to-day, when they were still fighting beyond the ruins of Ginchy, which they had won by a great assault.

He stood, a solitary figure by the side of the track down which his men came, and there was a great tenderness in the eyes of this brigadier as he watched them pass, and called out to them—words of thanks, and words of good cheer, and turned to me now and then to say how splendid they had been.

"Eyes right!" shouted the officers or sergeants who were leading their companies, and the General said, "Carry on, there," and "Well done—you did gloriously." "Bravo, Dublins! . . . You did well, damned well, Munsters, my lads!"

The men's eyes brightened at the sight of him; and they squared up, and grinned under German caps and German helmets.

"Hallo, Greene!" called out the brigadier to a very tall fellow tramping in the outside file. "Glad to see you're all right. And a big target, too!"

The music of the Irish pipes went calling down to the valley, and I watched the men out of sight with something stirring at my heart. Earlier in the morning, before they had formed up, I had been among them and had heard many stories of great adventure and of great courage, told sometimes with an Irish humour that finds a whimsicality even in the most awful moments, and sometimes with the sadness of men who mourn for their friends, but wonderfully untouched by the fearful strain of it all and with a grim joy in their victory.

Some of them had been in Gallipoli, and one sergeant of the Munsters told me that the taking of Ginchy was the "hottest" thing he had seen since the landing on August 21 at Suvla Bay. There were two men in his regiment who had fought all through from Mons, and had escaped from the hell of the Dardanelles, but had fallen now, at last, on the way up from Guillemont. He and other men of the old Regulars spoke of the regiments of the New Army who had fought with them to-day.

"They were just great. The Irish Rifles went through like

a whirlwind. There was no stopping them. When the Germans ran you couldn't see them for dust."

3

The story of the Irish Brigades does not begin at Ginchy. It begins last Sunday, a week ago, at Guillemont, when one brigade, as I have already described in an earlier dispatch, went through the northern part of that village in one fierce assault which would not be checked. After that (as well as before) they lay under heavy shell-fire, without sleep and without hot food or much water, until the new attack, when they were on the right of the assault.

The brigade on the left, which had the greatest triumph yesterday, was lying out in connected shell-craters (the old kind of trench, neatly revetted, with strong traverses and cosy dug-outs, does not exist in this part of the battle-line). For five days they held on stubbornly under ceaseless shell-fire. When the hour of "zero" came for the attack they were not broken in spirit, as weaker men would have been after all this trial, but eager to get out and get on—"to get some of their own back."

The Germans in Ginchy would have had more terror in their hearts if they had known the character of the men who were about to storm their stronghold. They would have prayed to God to save them from the Irish. As it was, these German soldiers were not feeling safe. They were new men just sent up to the line, and conscious of a frightful menace about them. They belonged to the 185th Division, the 19th Bavarian Division, and the machine-gun company of the 88th Division. They crouched down in a network of dug-outs and tunnels under the ruins of the village expecting attack, and determined, as we know now, to sell their lives dearly. They were brave men.

4

The attack began yesterday afternoon shortly before five o'clock after a heavy bombardment. The Irish sprang up and went forward cheering. They shouted, "Go on, Munsters!" "Go on, Dublins!" and old Celtic cries. "Now then, Irish Rifles!" Our shell-fire crept up in front of them. They went

from the south in four waves in open order, with about 50 yards between each wave, and on the left the troops reached their first halting-place in the village, right across the first German trenches and dug-outs, in eight minutes after starting time—a distance of 600 yards, which is a wonderful record.

On the right the Irish were checked by three machine-guns well placed for very deadly work and sweeping the ground with waves of bullets. Many poor fellows dropped. Others fell deliberately with their faces to the earth so that the bullets might skim above their prone bodies. At the same time the Irish officers and men were being sniped by German marksmen who had crept out into shell-craters. It was a serious situation here unless the machine-guns could be "killed."

A brilliant little piece of tactics was done by the troops on the left of the right wing, who swung round and attacked the machine-gun position from the west and north, in an encircling movement so that the German teams had to run out of the loop with their weapons to some broken trenches 300 yards away, where they again fired until knocked out by some trench-mortars attached to one of the Irish battalions. This enabled the right wing to advance and join the left, and they then advanced together through the village, with the Irish Rifles remaining to hold the captured ground, and the Dublins charging ahead.

In the centre of the village among all the dug-outs and tunnels was the ruin of an old farm in which the enemy had another machine-gun which they served with bursts of fire. Again our trench-mortar men saved the situation. They came on with the infantry, and ranged their little engines on to the farm, aiming with such skill that the hostile machine-gun was put out of action by a short storm of high explosives.

The men were still suffering from snipers and ordinary riflemen hidden in all kinds of places in the northern half of the village, where there were concreted and tunnelled chambers with loop-holes level with the ground, through which they shot. The Irish were reckless of all this and swept over the place fiercely, searching out their enemies. In shell-craters and bits of upheaved earth and down in the dug-outs there was hand-to-hand fighting of the grimmest kind. The Bavarians struggled savagely, using bombs and rifles, and fighting even with the bayonet until they were killed with the same weapon.

It was all very quick. Within ten minutes of reaching the line half-way through the village the leading Dublins had got to the northern end of it and sent out advanced parties 200 yards beyond. But there was one menace, which might have led to disaster but for quick wit and fighting genius.

The Irish had expected that their left flank would be supported by other troops attacking between Ginchy and Delville Wood, but owing to the difficulty of the ground in that neighbourhood and the rapidity of the Irish advance this had not been possible, and the victors of Ginchy found themselves with an exposed flank to the north-west of the village. A young sapper officer from Dublin realized the situation, and taking command of a body of men dug a defensive flank and established strong posts as a protection against a counter-attack. The situation on the extreme right was for some time equally perilous, as the troops engaged in an enterprise on that side had not yet made good their ground, and the splendid achievement of the Irish Brigade, from a military point of view, is their success—quite astoundingly good—of taking a hostile front of 900 yards to the depth of nearly a mile with no supporting troops on either flank.

5

From a non-military, untechnical, human point of view the greatness of the capture of Ginchy is just in the valour of those Irish boys who were not cowed by that sight of death very close to them and all about them, and who went straight on to the winning-posts like Irish race-horses. The men who were ordered to stay in the village almost wept with rage because they could not join in the next assault.

"We would have gone on into the blue," said one of them, "except for all this confounded diplomacy." Diplomacy is a fine word for the simple law of safeguarding the captured ground; but you see the spirit which used it. It was the same spirit which caused the temporary desertion of three Irish servants on the Brigade Staff. One of them left a note yesterday morning on his master's table: "As I could not be at Guillemont I am going to Ginchy. I hope to be back again, so please excuse."

Fine and wonderful men! There was a Sinn Feiner among

them, with all the passion of his political creed and " a splendid soldier," said one of his officers, who is an Englishman. Nationalists and Catholics, Irish to the bone, with every tradition of their race in their blood and spirit, they fought yesterday and in the dawn of to-day without any thought of grievance or any memory of hatred, except against the enemy, whom they call " Jerry " instead of Fritz.

In fair fight they were relentless, but they were kind to their prisoners. It is queer how hatred and kindness alternates in these men. One man told me the strangest tale with absolute truth, I am sure, because of his fine, steady eyes. He captured a big Saxon in a shell-hole the night before the attack. The man was wounded in the leg and back, but held a revolver, and was not too ill to fight. But he had no fight left in him when the Irishman jumped down to him.

" Are you going to kill me ? " he asked in good English.

" Sure, no," said the Irishman. " But just put away that pistol, won't you." Then the Irish sergeant undid his own field dressing and bound up the man's leg and back (it was all under the loud whistling of shells). and said, " Now get along with you back to your own lines, for faith I don't mean any harm to you."

So away went the German into Ginchy, and afterwards, no doubt, wished he hadn't.

A tall Irishman, describing the great charge to me, said: " The small, little men went over with the greatest pluck, sir, so that it was a real pleasure to see. And the Jerry boys ran that fast the dust was in their throats, it was."

" How did you get that Boche cap ? " one man asked another. " Did you kill your man ? "

" Did I kill him ? . . . I brought down fourteen prisoners all by myself, I did, and if you don't believe it, here's my receipt for the same."

He held out a slip of paper, and there sure enough was the officer's receipt for the fourteen men.

One German climbed up a tree during the attack. He had a white cap-band and a white ribbon on his shoulder, and seemed to be signalling.

" Now, come down, Jerry," shouted five Irishmen in a chorus. " If you don't come down we'll shoot you, we will."

The man would not come down.

"And sure we shot him," was the end of the story.

The honours of the day are with the Irish, and these gallant men hope—they spoke about it pleadingly—that their losses will be filled up by Irishmen, so that the spirit of their regiments may be kept.

XXIX

THE COMING OF THE TANKS

1

SEPTEMBER 16

ANOTHER day of great remembrance has been given to our history by British troops, September the Fifteenth, that will not quickly pass out of the memory of our people, for on that day, which was yesterday, our soldiers broke through the enemy's third line of defence and went out into open country, and gave staggering blows to that German war-machine which for two years, all but two months, seemed unbreakably strong against us.

It was a day of good success yesterday. It was no longer a promise of future victory, dependent upon all the flukes and chances of war, with their awful hazards, but, for one day at least, not looking further, the real thing.

Our men had the taste of victory, and it was like a strong drug to their hearts, so that they laughed even while blood was streaming down their faces, and said " It's wonderful ! " when they came limping off the battlefields with wounds on fire, and said " We made 'em run like rabbits ! " when they lay on stretchers and could not move without a groan.

And it was wonderful indeed. For this day of victory came after two and a half months of continued and most bloody fighting. This new British Army of ours had not had an easy walk through after its time of preparation and training in the dirty ditches of the old trench warfare.

The task that was set to our soldiers yesterday would have been formidable on the first day of a great offensive. Coming after two and a half months, it was startling in its boldness, and showed that our Generals had supreme confidence in the men, in their own powers of organization, and in the luck of

battle that comes to those who have worked for it. The enemy believed that our offensive had petered out. There is much evidence for that.

They did not believe it possible that an army of our size and strength could carry on the attack at the same fierce pace. They cherished the hope that our divisions were broken and spent, that our stores of ammunition were giving out, and that our men were overtired.

They still had faith in their own gun-power, the defensive strength of a thousand guns against the British front, and it was a reasonable faith. They had been digging furiously on dark nights to strengthen the third line of defence—the famous Flers line, which was, they thought, to be the boundary of our advancing tide, and though they were anxious, and were counting up frightful losses on the Somme, they did not expect this last disaster to them.

Yesterday I saw their prisoners coming off the battlefields in droves, and to-day hundreds of them in the barbed-wire cages behind the lines. They were dazed men, filled with gloom, and tortured by a great bewilderment.

"It is your victory," said one of their officers, speaking to me in French. "It is our defeat. I cannot understand."

"Germany is 'kaput,'" said one of their non-commissioned officers. He meant that Germany is down—"in the soup," as our soldiers would say. It was an exaggeration, for Germany has still a lot of fight left in her, but it was the belief of her beaten soldiers yesterday.

Our men were exalted—excited by the smell of victory, exaggerating also our own gains gloriously in the belief that "the last great smash had been made, and that the end of this foul and filthy war is at hand." They "went over" at dawn yesterday filled with the spirit of victory, and it was half the battle won.

2

Many of them went over, too, in the greatest good-humour, laughing as they ran. Like children whose fancy has been inflamed by some new toy, they were enormously cheered by a new weapon which was to be tried with them for the first time—"the heavily armoured car" mentioned already in the official bulletin.

That description is a dull one compared with all the rich and rare qualities which belong to these extraordinary vehicles. The secret of them was kept for months jealously and nobly. It was only a few days ago that it was whispered to me.

"Like prehistoric monsters. You know, the old Ichthyosaurus," said the officer.

I told him he was pulling my leg.

"But it's a fact, man!"

He breathed hard, and laughed in a queer way at some enormous comicality.

"They eat up houses and put the refuse under their bellies. Walk right over 'em!"

I knew this man was a truthful and simple soul, and yet could not believe.

"They knock down trees like match-sticks," he said, staring at me with shining eyes. "They go clean through a wood!"

"And anything else?" I asked, enjoying what I thought was a new sense of humour.

"Everything else," he said earnestly. "They take ditches like kangaroos. They simply love shell-craters! Laugh at 'em!"

It appeared, also, that they were proof against rifle-bullets, machine-gun bullets, bombs, shell-splinters. Just shrugged their shoulders and passed on. Nothing but a direct hit from a fair-sized shell could do them any harm.

"But what's the name of these mythical monsters?" I asked, not believing a word of it.

He said "Hush!"

Other people said "Hush! . . . Hush!" when the subject was alluded to in a remote way. And since then I have heard that one name for them is the "Hush-hush." But their real name is Tanks.

For they are real, and I have seen them, and walked round them, and got inside their bodies, and looked at their mysterious organs, and watched their monstrous movements.

3

I came across a herd of them in a field, and, like the countryman who first saw a giraffe, said "Hell! . . . I don't believe it." Then I sat down on the grass and laughed until the tears

came into my eyes. (In war one has a funny sense of humour.) For they were monstrously comical, like toads of vast size emerging from the primeval slime in the twilight of the world's dawn.

The skipper of one of them introduced me to them.

"I felt awfully bucked," said the young officer (who is about five feet high), "when my beauty ate up her first house. But I was sorry for the house, which was quite a good one."

"And how about trees?" I asked.

"They simply love trees," he answered.

When our soldiers first saw these strange creatures lolloping along the roads and over old battlefields, taking trenches on the way, they shouted and cheered wildly, and laughed for a day afterwards. And yesterday the troops got out of their trenches laughing and shouting and cheering again because the Tanks had gone on ahead, and were scaring the Germans dreadfully, while they moved over the enemy's trenches and poured out fire on every side. As I shall write later, these motor monsters had strange adventures and did very good work, justifying their amazing existence.

4

For several days before the great blow was to be made, and while there was heavy fighting in progress at most parts of the line—the capture of Guillemont by English and Irish troops, the splendid rush of the Irish through Ginchy—there was a steady forward movement and concentration of all the men and machinery to strike at the Flers line.

Villages beyond the zone of fire where battalions had been resting and where there was the busy life of soldiers in their billeting areas suddenly became emptied of all this human interest.

The men had passed on—higher up the roads, and higher up where there was a struggling tide of all the traffic of war—with supply columns, mule-trains, guns, limber, ambulances, and troops from all parts of the Empire, surging, swirling, struggling slowly forward through narrow village streets, up long winding roads, across trampled and barren fields, through the ruins of villages destroyed a year or more ago, and out into the country of evil menace which is criss-crossed by old

trenches and pitted with old shell-craters and strewn with the refuse of battles two months back in history.

Here a great army with all its material of war—incredibly vast and crowded—lay waiting for the hour when it should be hurled to the great hammer-stroke.

They were masses of men who were there the night before the battle hidden in the darkness of the earth, not revealed even by the white moonlight except in huddled crowds and camps, but as I passed them again a few hours before the dawn I thought of the individual and not of the mass, all the separate hopes and pulse-beats of these men who were going to do a big thing if luck should favour us.

And out of the darkness I thought I heard the sound of laughter rising at the thought of the monstrous "Hush-hush." Before the dawn the moon was high and clear in a sky that had hardly any clouds. It shone down upon the fields and roads so that the plaster walls of French cottages were very white under the black roofs, and rows of tents were like little hillocks of snow in the harvest-fields.

As I looked up a shooting star flashed across the sky, and I thought of the old legend of a passing life, and wondered why to-night all the stars were not falling.

Presently dawn came, and some low-lying clouds were touched with a warm glow which deepened and spread until they were all crimson. It was a red dawn.

"The promise of victory like the sun of Austerlitz," said an officer.

Before six o'clock, summer time, all our guns were firing steadily, and all the sky, very pale and shimmering in the first twilight of the day, was filled with the flashes of guns and shell-bursts. Heavy howitzers were eating up shells.

I went to the right of the line, hoping to see the infantry attack to the left of Leuze Wood, as I had watched the battle here a week or two ago, and here one of the motor monsters was coming across the ground. But as the sun rose higher it drew the moisture out of all these shell-craters and trenches, and a dense white mist blotted out the ridge for an hour or more. French troops who join our line here came across

country. British soldiers were moving forward on the left, silently, with the mist about them.

Overhead shells went rushing—heavy shells that travelled with the noise of trains. Forward batteries were firing rapidly and increasingly, and then sharp staccato knocking was clear above the heavy crashes of giant "crumps," compared by a whimsical mind in this war with "an immortal plumber laying down his tools."

Machine-gun fire rapped out in fierce spasms, and the German "Archies" were throwing up shells which burst all about the planes of our airmen, who came like a flock of birds over the battlefields, flying low above the mists.

They did wonderful things yesterday, those British air-pilots, risking their lives audaciously in single combats with hostile airmen, in encounters against great odds, in bombing enemy headquarters and railway stations and kite-balloons and troops, and registering or observing all day long for our artillery. They were out to destroy the enemy's last means of observation, and they began the success of the battle by gaining the absolute mastery of the air.

Thirteen German aeroplanes (since reported by Sir Douglas Haig to be fifteen) were brought down, and their flying men dared not come across our lines to risk more losses.

On our side it was fighting "all in." There was nothing of a killing character within our reach and knowledge which we did not use, and we turned the enemy's own worst weapons against himself.

Every material of war made by the home workers in our factories by months of toil was called in.

The men went in with the resolve to break through the enemy's third line without counting the cost, to smash down any opposition they might meet, and to go forward and far until they could get the enemy on the run.

A body of Scots went up to the battle-lines to the tune of "Stop your tickling, Jock," but there was a grim meaning in the music, and it was no love-song.

English soldiers had been practising bayonet exercise harder than usual, and with a personal interest beyond the discipline. "It's time to finish old Fritz" was the shout of one soldier to another. "We want to go home for Christmas!"

The men fought yesterday fiercely and ruthlessly. They

want to get on to the heels of the enemy, and there were moments yesterday when they saw many pairs of heels.

The area of our attack extended on the left from the ground north of Pozières to the line recently won to the north of Ginchy on the right, and its purpose was, as I have said, to break through the third German line below Courcelette, Martinpuich, and Lesbœufs, a distance of about six miles. Time of attack was shortly after six o'clock yesterday morning, and along all the line the troops were awaiting the moment to rise, after our artillery had completed its first barrage.

On the left in front of Courcelette there was hard and unexpected fighting. As we now know the enemy had prepared an attack against us, and had massed troops in considerable force in his front and reserve lines. He sent out advanced patrols and bombing parties, while our men were waiting to go over, and immediately there was a fierce encounter.

One young brown-eyed fellow told me his own experience, and it was like many others.

"The sergeant in my bay," he said, "suddenly called out that he had seen a signal light go up from another point of the trenches giving a warning of attack. 'We shall have the whole lot on us,' he shouted. 'Look out for yourselves, lads.'"

The enemy came over in a rush. Many fell before the rifle-fire of our men, but others managed to jump into portions of trench, and bombed their way up several of the bays.

Machine-guns were turned on to them, and there were not many left alive. But before the fight had ended a new one began, for our jumping-off time had come, and the assaulting troops rose as one man, and taking no notice of what had happened swept across their own trenches and the Germans who were in them, and went straight across country towards Courcelette.

They came up immediately against difficult ground and fierce machine-gun fire. South-east of Courcelette, beyond the shell-craters and bits of broken trench which the men had carried easily enough, sweeping the Germans down before them, stood the ruins of a sugar factory, which the enemy had made into a redoubt, with machine-gun emplacements.

It was one of those deadly places which have cost so many lives among our men in other parts of the battle-ground now in our hands.

7

But we had a new engine of war to destroy the place. Over our own trenches in the twilight of the dawn one of those motor-monsters had lurched up, and now it came crawling forward to the rescue, cheered by the assaulting troops, who called out words of encouragement to it and laughed, so that some men were laughing even when bullets caught them in the throat.

"Crême de Menthe" was the name of this particular creature, and it waddled forward right over the old German trenches, and went forward very steadily towards the sugar factory.

There was a second of silence from the enemy there. Then, suddenly, their machine-gun fire burst out in nervous spasms and splashed the sides of "Crême de Menthe."

But the Tank did not mind. The bullets fell from its sides, harmlessly. It advanced upon a broken wall, leaned up against it heavily until it fell with a crash of bricks, and then rose on to the bricks and passed over them, and walked straight into the midst of the factory ruins.

From its sides came flashes of fire and a hose of bullets, and then it trampled around over machine emplacements, "having a grand time," as one of the men said with enthusiasm.

It crushed the machine-guns under its heavy ribs, and killed machine-gun teams with a deadly fire. The infantry followed in and took the place after this good help, and then advanced again round the flanks of the monster.

In spite of the Tank, which did such grand work, the assault on Courcelette was hard and costly. Again and again the men came under machine-gun fire and rifle-fire, for the Germans had dug new trenches, called the Fabeckgraben and Zollerngraben, which had not been wiped out by our artillery, and they fought with great courage and desperation.

Seventy men who advanced first on a part of these lines were swept down. Seventy others who went forward to fill their places fell also to a man. But their comrades were not disheartened, and at last carried the position in a great wave of assault.

Then they went on to the village. It was like all these villages in German hands, tunnelled with a nest of dug-outs, and a stronghold hard to take. The British troops entered it from the eastern side, fought yard by yard, stubbornly resolved to have it.

The Tank came along and ploughed about, searching for German machine-guns, thrusting over bits of wall, nosing here and there, and sitting on heaps of ruin while it fired down the streets. By 6.30 last evening the village was taken.

The British took 400 prisoners, and when they were brought down to Pozières last night they passed old "Crême de Menthe," who was going home, and held up their hands crying, "Gott in Himmel!" and asked how they could fight against such monstrous things.

The taking of Courcelette was a great achievement skilfully planned and carried out with stern and high courage by splendid men, and one monster.

8

On the right of these troops there was a great assault upon Martinpuich and High Wood. Here, also, in High Wood, the Germans had been ready for an attack, and, being forestalled in that, they made a strong counter-attack which for a time had some success, driving our men back to the southern edge of the wood.

Our troops had been heavily shelled beforehand, and they found the enemy in much stronger force than they had expected in that wood of bitter memory. But these men of ours—I had met many of them before, a year ago—fought very gamely.

Some among them were utterly without experience of the Somme kind of fighting and wilted a little before its ferocity of fire, but the older men, the "veterans" of a year's service or more, cheered them up, kept them steady, and led them on.

They counter-attacked the counter-attack and regained their old line, and then to their great joy saw the Tanks advancing through High Wood and on each side of it.

"It was like a fairy tale!" said a Cockney boy. "I can't help laughing every time I think of it."

He laughed then, though he had a broken arm and was covered in blood.

"They broke down trees as if they were match-sticks, and went over barricades like elephants. The Boches were thoroughly scared. They came running out of shell-holes and trenches, shouting like mad things.

"Some of them attacked the Tanks and tried to bomb them, but it wasn't a bit of good. O Crikey, it was a rare treat to see! The biggest joke that ever was! They just stamped down the German dug-out as one might a whops' nest."

On the left of High Wood was a very fine body of troops who had no trenches to lie in, but just lay out in shell-craters under a constant fire of "whizz-bangs," that is to say, field-guns firing at short range, which was extremely hard to endure.

"It was cruel," said one of these men, "but we went forward all right when the time came, over the bodies of comrades who were lying in pools of blood, and afterwards the enemy had to pay."

9

They were co-operating with some troops on their left, who went straight for Martinpuich, that village into which I stared a week or two ago after a long walk to our front line on the crest of the ridge beyond Bazentin, looking at the Promised Land.

These men were superb and went across No Man's Land for nearly 1000 yards in six minutes, racing. They made short work with the Germans who tried to snipe them from the shell-craters, and only came to a check on the outskirts of Martinpuich, where they were received with a blast of machine-gun fire.

It was then the turn of the Tanks.

Before the dawn two of them had come up out of the darkness and lumbered over our front-line trenches, looking towards the enemy as though hungry for breakfast. Afterwards they came across No Man's Land like enormous toads with pains in their stomachs, and nosed at Martinpuich before testing the strength of its broken barns and bricks.

The men cheered them wildly, waving their helmets and dancing round them. One company needed cheering up, for they had lost two of their officers the night before in a patrol adventure, and it was the sergeants who led them over.

Twenty minutes afterwards the first waves were inside the

first trench of Martinpuich and in advance of them waddled a monster.

The men were held up for some time by the same machine-gun fire which has killed so many of our men, but the monsters went on alone, and had astounding adventures.

They went straight through the shells of broken barns and houses, straddled on top of German dug-outs, and fired enfilading shots down German trenches.

From one dug-out came a German colonel with a white, frightened face, who held his hands very high in front of the Tank, shouting, "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

"Well, come inside then," said a voice in the body of the beast, and a human hand came forth from a hole opening suddenly and grabbed the German officer.

For the rest of the day the Tank led that unfortunate man about on the strangest journey the world has ever seen.

Another Tank was confronted with one hundred Germans, who shouted "Mercy! Mercy!" and at the head of this procession led them back as prisoners to our lines. Yet another Tank went off to the right of Martinpuich, and was so fresh and high-spirited that it went far into the enemy's lines, as though on the way to Berlin.

The men were not so fortunate as the monsters, not being proof against machine-gun bullets. The enemy concentrated a very heavy fire upon them, and many fell. One boy—a fine, stout-hearted lad who had a keen and spirited look in spite of dreadful experience—told me a tale that Edgar Allan Poe might have written if he had lived to see things worse than anything in his morbid imaginings—one of our common tales.

A German "crump" killed a lance-corporal by his side and buried them both completely.

"It was just my steel hat that kept the earth from my face," said the boy, "and gave me a little handful of air to breathe. It was in a wee trench we had dug to get some cover. But now I was covered too much.

"It seemed like an hour I was there, but perhaps no more than half that time. I tried to shout, but could not. A man walked over my head, but did not know I was there.

"Presently they saw the lance-corporal's leg sticking out, and started to pull him. I got my hand out, and waggled it,

and they started digging for me. It was just time. The veins were starting out of my head, and I was nearly gone."

It was late in the evening before the whole of Martinpuich was taken after fierce fighting, and it was the crowning triumph of a successful day.

10

The troops on the left side of the line did amazingly well, and were handled well. They took forty German officers and 1430 other ranks. Against them was the 2nd Bavarian Corps, whom many of our men had met before at Kemmel and the Hohenzollern and Ypres, glad now to pay off old scores against them.

On the right of the troops at Martinpuich the attack was swinging up to Flers across a wide stretch of difficult and perilous ground strongly defended.

The enemy was flinging over storms of shrapnel and high explosives, and many of our men fell; but the wounded shouted on the others, if they were not too badly hit, and the others went forward grimly and steadily.

These soldiers of ours were superb in courage and stoic endurance, and pressed forward steadily in broken waves. The first news of success came through from an airman's wireless, which said:

"A Tank is walking up the High Street of Flers with the British Army cheering behind."

It was an actual fact. One of the motor-monsters was there, enjoying itself thoroughly, and keeping down the heads of the enemy.

It hung out a big piece of paper, on which were the words:

"GREAT HUN DEFEAT. SPECIAL!"

The aeroplane flew low over its carcass, machine-gunning the scared Germans, who fled before the monstrous apparition. Later in the day it seemed to have been in need of a rest before coming home, and two humans got out of its inside and walked back to our lines.

But, by that time, Flers and many prisoners were in our hands, and our troops had gone beyond to farther fields.

11

On the extreme right of our line of attack the fighting was hardest and fiercest of all, and is still very confused and uncertain to the north of Ginchy and in the direction of Guedecourt. In this direction the enemy fought with fine courage. Machine-gun fire swept our men from the direction of Morval and Combles, and the shell-fire was frightful in its violence.

Nevertheless, the first rush forward was magnificent on the part of the troops. They were the Guards.

"Lots of our men dropped," said one of them, "but we didn't look round or bother about anything or see anything of what was going on around us. We had orders to push on, and we pushed."

The enemy resisted stoutly along his first line. They kept up a severe rifle-fire and machine-gun fire until our men were right on them, and then fought bayonet to bayonet.

Large numbers of them were killed, and the troops swept through to the second line of trenches and took that.

A third wave passed through them to the third German trench, but before they reached this goal the German soldiers came out with their hands up and surrendered. Our men went on and on.

"The Boches ran like rabbits before us," said several of them. They went too far, these soldiers, in their eagerness. One of the colonels stood up on a hillock blowing a hunting-horn to fetch them back, but they did not hear, and went on still farther, unsupported by troops on their right.

The officers waved on the men with their revolvers, and many fell leading their companies. It was one of the greatest charges in history, but drove out too far into the "blue" without sufficient co-operation, with troops held up lower down by strong points and machine-guns. What the situation is there to-night I do not yet know, except that our men were fighting on the outskirts of Guedecourt.

12

I have no time to tell of all the great drama I have seen—the long trails of the walking wounded, marvellously brave, wonderfully full of spirits, the long columns of German prisoners

tramping back from the battlefields, dejected and miserable, and other great pictures of war not yet to be written.

The German prisoners were utterly dismayed—bewildered beyond words. Some of the officers tried to shrug it off as "a stroke of luck," but others admitted that we had surprised them by a great and brilliant stroke.

One of them with whom I spoke was a young artillery officer who had fought against us at Ypres in 1914, and afterwards against the Russians.

"The Somme is the worst of all for us," he said. "It is fearful."

Several German officers were appalling figures, in masks of horror, their faces as black as negroes. They had been in a dug-out blown up by one of our bombs, and it was full of Very lights, which flamed about them and burnt them black.

It was a black day for Germany, and the hardest blow that has been struck at her heart and pride by British troops. For us the glory of the day is in the splendour of our men.

XXX

FIGHTING BEYOND FLERS

1

SEPTEMBER 17

THE enemy has made desperate attempts to organize counter-attacks to thrust back our lines from the ground gained by us since Friday morning. They have failed. We hold all the ground captured in the general assault, and yesterday and to-day our troops have gone farther forward, winning new and important positions.

Mouquet Farm, for which the Australians fought with a most stubborn courage, entering the place several times with their patrols, was taken last night by a swift and successful assault. Left of that, below Thiépval, and to the east of that stronghold, attacks beginning last Thursday on a fortified position known as the " Wunderwerk " (a curious and villainous system of trenches and dug-outs) have been a brilliant success, and have extended our gain by a mile of frontage along the Danube Trench.

We have a strong flank line securing Courcelette and have pushed out beyond Martinpuich towards Eaucourt-l'Abbaye, and beyond Flers towards Geudecourt. The day has not been so sensational as Friday, but solid progress has been made, and the enemy is kept nervous.

He has been hurrying up reserves from Le Sars and Miraumont and places far back behind his lines. They were reported to be moving up yesterday by motor transport, and our long-range guns " dealt with them," to use the grim phrase of one of our artillery officers.

The enemy's losses are certainly very frightful. His dead lie solid in certain parts of the battle-front. There are fields of horror here round High Wood and above Delville Wood, and

not all the shells which I saw slashing those rows of tree-stumps to-day will give the enemy back those men who are being buried by his high explosives.

The whole of the great stretch of battlefield along the high ridge to Delville Wood and Ginchy is one great graveyard, and looking across it to-day, as I stood among shell-craters and old German trenches and the litter of a wide destruction, this great desolate horror was an evil panorama which chilled one's spirit.

The enemy was flinging over heavy "crumps" and black shrapnel, but his shooting seemed to me wild and without definite targets. The reason of it was clear. In taking the high ridge we have the observation which was once his, and it is our artillery which now has the supreme advantage.

2

The bombardment of September 15 was the most remarkable achievement ever done by British artillery, and not surpassed, I should say, in any army. Every detail of it was planned beforehand.

Every "heavy" had its special objective and its own time-table, working exactly with the infantry, concentrating upon the enemy's trenches and strong points, barraging his lines of communication, following the tracks of those motor monsters whose amazing adventures I described in my last dispatch, and co-operating with the air service to reach out to distant targets.

The field-batteries were marvellously audacious in taking up new positions, and the F.O.O.'s (the forward observing officers) were gallant in getting up to the high ground as soon as our infantry had taken it and registering their batteries from these new view-points.

I heard to-day the whole artillery scheme of one corps and the scientific precision with which the enemy's defences were destroyed made me shiver as in the presence of a high intelligence distributing death on a great scale, by means of minute calculations of time and space, which, indeed, is exactly the truth.

The enemy's artillery is still very strong, and it would be nonsense to depreciate his prodigious gun-power. But some at least of his batteries are in a perilous position now that we

are able to observe them, and from my own observation of his shell-fire to-day it seems to me that he is shifting them farther back.

He had not shifted them when our attack began on Friday morning last (although our counter-battery work was making it extremely hot for him), and it is remarkable that within two minutes of our attack he concentrated a particularly fierce fire on High Wood, where our men were advancing.

"It is possible that his "sausage" balloons had observed the approach of the Tanks, and had seen them behind our trenches, like ichthyosauri waiting for their morning meal. But, as I have previously hinted, there is sound evidence for the belief that he had prepared a great counter-attack along a wide front at the very time when our own was launched.

This accounts for the great mass of men killed in his lines and for the large number of prisoners who fell into our hands.

The capture of Mouquet Farm last night was made by a dash across a short strip of No Man's Land. The garrison there retreated into a tunnelled dug-out, which had at least two entrances, and showed no willingness to surrender, maintaining rifle-fire from loopholes after they were surrounded.

The southern entrance to this underground stronghold was blown in by high explosives, while men kept guard of the other entry, waiting for any Germans, who might come up to surrender.

This capture of Mouquet Farm (a stick or two above a heap of broken brickwork, as I saw it some weeks ago) has made the position of Thiépval still more closely gripped—the garrison there holds out stubbornly in its tunnelled corridors—and helped forward the assault upon the Danube Trench launched with absolute success.

This carried further the operation begun last Thursday, when our troops made one of those brilliant assaults upon the intricate system of earthworks to the south of Thiépval, which I watched a few weeks ago, when the Wiltshires and the Gloucesters did so well.

On the left, running southwards down the ridge, is an extraordinary V-shaped wedge with an open end. This

position was not attacked, but our men drove straight up to the left of it, upon the "Wonder-work," which was one of those nests of dug-outs upon which the Germans lavished all their skill in digging and pommelling and strengthening and furnishing in what soldiers call "the days of peace"—the old days of ordinary trench-warfare.

It was no longer a "Wonder-work" when our men rushed upon it. A whirlwind bombardment, which had preceded them, and heavy shell-fire for weeks past had broken the concrete emplacements and flung up the earth with deep shell-pits, so that it was merely a part of the general chaos existing on these battlefields.

Five German officers and 116 men were still alive there, and surrendered instantly. "You were on us like the wind," said one of these officers afterwards. "We had no time to defend ourselves." Other men fled from neighbouring shell-craters, but ran straight into our curtain-fire and fell.

Our lads chased some of them as they ran, but halted this side of our bursting shells, and came back "fearfully bucked," to use their own phrase, because they had put the enemy to flight and mastered him so utterly.

4

Yesterday counter-attacks were attempted by the 5th Reserve Regiment of Guards, but they were not carried through with resolution. The first wave of men came a hundred yards or so towards our men, then hesitated, flung their bombs, which fell ludicrously short, and ran back.

On the left they were bolder and brave, and a very long and stubborn fight took place with bombs, ending in the complete victory of our men after they had flung 1500 hand-grenades.

North-east of Flers other counter-attacks were attempted yesterday, but our troops who were advancing towards Guedecourt went right through them and over them with irresistible spirit, checked only by concealed machine-guns in a harvest-field on their wing.

In Bouleaux Wood, to the north of Leuze Wood, there has been fierce hand-to-hand fighting, and in the centre of it is an unfortunate Tank—one of the few casualties among the

armoured monsters—which lies with its nose in the earth, forming a barricade between the opposing bombers.

The general situation along our attacking front leaves the initiative in our hands and reveals the temporary demoralization of the enemy's troops and command.

One cannot say more than that. The enemy has had a hard blow, but he has reserves of strength which are controlled by cool brains behind his lines.

There is still much fighting to be done before Germany's weakness reaches the breaking-point, but the losses we have inflicted upon her during the last three days are so terrible that she cannot hide her wounds.

XXXI

MONSTERS AND MEN

1

SEPTEMBER 18

IN all the accounts of the fighting since Friday the story of the Tanks—those weird and wonderful armoured monsters—runs like a humorous thread. Full of humour and fantasy, because of their shape and qualities, they are also filled with very gallant men, to whom great honour is due. The skippers and crews of these land-ships, as they are called, had to go out alone in many cases in advance of the infantry and upon hazardous chances, which each one of them knew were weighted with the risk, almost the certainty—for it was a new, untried experiment—of death. They had astounding adventures and a large measure of success, and it was due, not to any kind of luck, but to great skill and great courage.

I have already told the first stories of their actions. To-day I obtained a full narrative of their achievements, and it is one of the most dramatic and gallant records in the history of this war.

Two of them who set out to attack the line from Combles to Morval made a rendezvous at Wedge Wood, and took up their position at night. One of them set off and ambled slowly until it came within 400 yards north-west of Combles, far in advance of the infantry. Here it sat for five hours, fighting the enemy alone, and shooting down German bombing parties until it was severely damaged.

The other Tank in the neighbourhood of Bouleaux Wood reached the enemy's trenches near Morval, and, finding that it had left the infantry behind, went back to inquire for them. They were held up by German bombers in a trench, so the Tank came to the rescue, bucked over the trench, and crushed the

bombers into the earth before backing into a deep shell-crater and toppling over. Here for an hour and a half it formed a barricade between British and German bombers, and the crew got out and tried to hoist it out of the shell-hole under heavy fire. One of the men picked up a live bomb flung by the enemy, and tried to hurl it to a safe distance. away from his comrades, but was blown to bits. Finally the "skipper," with his surviving men, came back to our lines, leaving the derelict monster still used as a barricade.

North of Ginchy telegraph one of the Tanks attacked a machine-gun emplacement and killed many of the men. East of Delville Wood another advanced upon a German trench called Laager Lane, and so frightened the enemy that about a hundred of them came out under white flags and surrendered to it, following the monster back to our lines.

The attack on Hop Alley, by Delville Wood, was led by a Tank which attacked a number of bombers and put them to flight, so that the trench was cleared for the infantry. Afterwards, under a heavy German barrage, it could advance no farther, and the skipper and his crew, after doing this fine work, came out of their monster and, with splendid heroism, helped our wounded for three hours.

The officer who did what the soldiers call the great "stunt" in Flers told me his story to-day, and I found him to be as modest a fellow as any naval officer on a light cruiser, and of the same fine type. He went into Flers before the infantry and followed by them, cheering in high spirits, and knocked out a machine-gun which began to play on him. The town was not much damaged by shell-fire, so that the Tank could walk about real streets, and the garrison, which was hiding about in dug-outs, surrendered in small, scared groups. Then the other Tanks came into Flers, and together they lolloped around the town in a free and easy manner before going farther afield.

The Tank which went through High Wood did great execution over the German trenches, and another wandered around shell-craters "killing" German machine-guns. The casualties were slight considering the great success of the experiment, and on all sides among our soldiers there is nothing but praise of the gallant men who led them. They are still going strong.

To-day one of the monsters—it was old "Cordon Rouge"—came waddling over shell-craters, climbing over broken trenches,

and fetched up outside the door of a brigadier's dug-out. From the inside of the beast came a very cool and grave young man, who saluted in a naval way, and said, "I await your orders, sir, for going into action."

"And I'm very glad you didn't bring your monster down into my dug-out," said the brigadier. "But it's very kind of you to call, and no doubt we shall want you shortly."

2

I have been to-day, and for four days, among the men who have broken the Flers line and given the enemy the hardest blows he has ever suffered on this front. Sir Douglas Haig has named them this afternoon in his great bulletin, paying a tribute to their valour in a broad, general way, without letting the enemy know too much about the battalions facing him. They were all splendid. For the big battle on Friday was a hard one, and not a "walk-over," so that our men were put to the supreme test of courage by most damnable shell-fire and fierce concentrated barrages by which the enemy's gunners at long ranges endeavoured to support their lost and suffering infantry.

What touched me most, perhaps, though Heaven knows the experiences of all our soldiers made one awe-struck, was the way in which our newest and youngest men went through with their business. There were some of them Derby recruits, who had never yet seen what shell-fire means in the Somme battles. Older men among them, who knew, were sorry for them, wondered how they would "stick it," and said, with a view to encouragement, "Cheer up, you'll soon be dead." They did not hang back, these new fellows. The rawest recruits among them strained forward with the rest, floundered over the shell-holes like the others, and leapt into the German trenches, like men of old fighting spirit.

3

The London men did gloriously and had one of the hardest points of the attack, and came under some of the heaviest storms of fire. These young Civil servants and men of the London suburbs, who used to go to City offices by early morning trains—do you remember how they spoke once of "London

pride?"—fought sternly and endured with stoicism, and had a laugh left in them after the battle when they forgot the frightfulness of it all and remembered the fantastic adventures of the Tanks which waddled into the German lines, knocking down tree-stumps, climbing over heaps of ruin, and "putting the wind up" in the enemy's ranks. "It was a fair treat!" said one of them. "Every time I think of it I can't help laughing!" And yet it was no joke, after all, but very grim and deadly work.

There was hardly a county of England which did not have its sons in this battle, and all those English regiments of the north and the south were so good, so fine, so full of spirit, that it made one wonder at the stock that has bred these men, giving to them out of the strain of England some quality of blood that has withstood all the weakening influences of factory life and city life. And yet, having written that, I see it is foolishness. For men of all the Empire were here, and it was the spirit of the whole race that rose at dawn out of the trenches and shell-craters and went forward into the furnace-fires.

4

About the Scottish troops I can say no more than I have said a hundred times, loving all those Lowlanders and Highlanders "this side idolatry."

I was with some of their officers to-day again, and heard stories of their men who took one of the German strongholds after a serpentine plan of attack difficult to perform, because in attacking men will go straight, and coming under shell-fire which would have broken the spirit of weaker men. But they went on in waves over the German trenches and into the village where some hundreds of men surrendered to them, coming up out of the dug-outs as soon as the Scots were about their hiding-places.

The German soldiers had been thoroughly frightened by the Tank, which had come nosing in before the infantry, and many of them huddled piteously under its flanks in order to escape from its rapid fire. Sixty men came out of one dug-out and surrendered in this way. Afterwards the Scots pushed on beyond the stronghold and established posts and dug cover for themselves against the enemy's gun-fire, which threw an

enormous number of high explosives into their old place of defence, which was stacked with timber for dug-outs and other stores of war material.

5

The Canadians gained great glory on Friday and Saturday. After their long and hard experiences in the salient they came down to the Somme battlefield determined to "get their own back," and do great adventures. Their attack was finely organized, and when all the difficulties are known will be put down to their credit as a really great military achievement. Among them is a body of French Canadians, dark-eyed fellows whom it is strange to meet about the villages of France speaking volubly with the peasants in their own tongue, a little old-fashioned, as it was once spoken in the days of Louis XIV, when Canada was one of the brightest rays in the glory of the Sun-King. These fellows, close in likeness to the provincial Frenchman, though perhaps more ardour and reserved, went away like wolves a-hunting, and raced forward to a German stronghold which they had asked leave to take.

They were swept by machine-gun fire and checked by a stubborn defence on the part of the enemy, but with the help of the two Tanks, called "Crême de Menthe" and "Cordon Rouge," who sat on the enemy's machine-gun emplacements and knocked out his machine-gun crews, the French Canadians carried the stronghold and captured hundreds of prisoners.

Later I hope to write the full story of the Canadian victory which will thrill through all the towns and fields of the great Dominion like an heroic song, for these men from overseas were very careless of death so that they might win.

6

Then there were the New-Zealanders, those clean-cut, handsome fellows in the felt hats with a bit of red ribbon round the brim, which I looked for down village streets and in French harvest-fields before they went into battle. Australia has set a great example to them, being first in the fighting round Pozières, where they fought as wonderfully as in the Dardanelles. They were not less gallant in the great charge they made at dawn on Friday, going forward very far to a distant place

across No Man's Land, and across German trenches, under heavy fire, and out "into the blue" in pursuit of retreating men.

7

Sir Douglas Haig mentions last of all the Guards, but not because they were least in valour. They fought as the Guards always fight, with superb discipline, and with a tradition that is sacred to them. I saw them before they went into battle, and had a meal in the mess of the Irish Guards, and saw them marching up to take their line in the battlefields.

They are not the old Guards who fought at Ypres and in many bloody battles when we were hard pressed, and afterwards at Loos, when they had some fearful hours. Many of those brave men lie under the soil of France, and new men have taken their place. But the tradition stays, and the physical standard of the men has not been lowered by a hair's-breadth, and their discipline is still upon the same high and hard level. Every one knew they would put up a great fight, and they did.

They had a very difficult part of the line, and had to pass machine-guns which swept upon their ranks in enfilade fire, and had to advance over ground covered by whirlwind fire of high explosives. But they gained their way forward in a series of charges which went straight through three lines of German trenches, and captured large numbers of prisoners after heavy fighting, and held on to their ground against strong counter-attacks. The tradition of the Guards has been upheld, and a new tradition has been given to them.

I must put into a line some late important news of the day, which is the great casualties inflicted upon the enemy in the neighbourhood of Guedecourt. A body of the enemy's infantry was observed to be retreating through the mist, and they were caught by some of our advanced patrols, who cut them to pieces with machine-gun fire. Elsewhere the enemy is surrendering in small batches, unable to stand the fearful slaughter inflicted upon them by our guns.

8 SEPTEMBER 19

Some of the most noble fighting qualities in the great battle of Friday last were shown by the troops who were responsible

for the centre of the attack directed against Flers and the country immediately to the right of that village. Those who were given the task of assaulting Flers itself were mostly recruited from the London area.

They had not seen much fighting before going into the great fire of the Somme battles. Their General, who had raised and trained them, was sure of them, and had taught each man the task expected of him on this great day, so that whatever might befall their officers, the men should not be mere sheep without a sense of guidance or direction.

When they formed up in line to the north of Delville Wood (with awkward bits of German trench thrust down upon their right flank), they had three lines in front of them over a distance of about 2500 yards barring their way to Flers. It was a long way and a hard way to go, but they leapt forward in solid waves of keen and eager men following a short and violent barrage from our heavy guns.

In a few minutes from the start the first two waves dropped into the German switch-line running diagonally from the real Flers line. They found it choked with German dead, killed by our gun-fire, and among them only a poor remnant of living men. The first two waves stayed in the trench to hold it. The others swept on, smashed through the Flers line, and forged their way over shell-craters under machine-gun and shrapnel fire, to the outskirts of Flers, which they reached between nine and ten in the morning.

Some London men were held up by barbed wire protecting a hidden trench which had not been previously observed, and a call was made for one of the Tanks which had come rolling up behind. It crawled forward, walking over the shell-craters, and smashed the whole length of barbed wire in front, firing rapidly upon the enemy's bombers in the trench and putting them out of action. This enabled the whole line to advance into Flers village at the tail of another Tank now famous for its adventures in Flers, which I have already narrated.

The victorious troops found but little opposition in the village. Curiously enough, it was not strongly defended or fortified. There were few of the tunnels and dug-outs which make many of these places hard to capture, and the enemy was utterly demoralized by the motor monster which appeared

as a bad dream before them. The enemy flung a heavy barrage, but our men had few casualties.

9

An attempt was made to reach Geudecourt, and, as I have already told, one of our Tanks reached the outskirts of that new objective. The infantry attack failed owing to massed machine-gun fire, and the men fell back to a new line of trenches hastily dug by the enemy before their defeat, which now gave us useful cover. This was 2700 yards from the starting-point at dawn, and was almost a record as a continuous advance.

The enemy rallied and made two counter-attacks, one at three o'clock in the afternoon, the other between four and five. They were tragic attempts. Some of our machine-gunners lay in waiting for them and mowed down these rows of men as they came bravely forward. It was such a sight as I watched at Falfemont Farm when solid bars of tall men crumbled and fell before a scythe of bullets.

At 6.30 on the following evening our troops made another attempt to reach Geudecourt in co-operation with the men on their right, but they were unable to get the whole distance in spite of a most heroic assault after two days of heavy fighting.

The force attacking on the right of Flers on Friday morning had similar experiences and more difficulties. They are men who know all there is to know about the Ypres salient, where I met them first nearly a year ago. They are men who have old scores to wipe off against the enemy in the way of poison-gas and flame-jets, and they went very fiercely into the battle.

To start with, they had to clear out a place known as Mystery Corner, to the right of Delville Wood, where they captured fifty-one prisoners, and afterwards a trench a little to the north of that, thrust down as a wedge between their left flank and the right of the troops who had started out for Flers.

This second strong point was wiped out by the Tanks, which came and sat down on it, and by a small body of North-countrymen working with the Tanks. Their particular job was done, and they might have stayed there, but, seeing the long waves of their comrades streaming forward to the main attack, they could not hold back, but followed on, all through the fight keeping touch in a most orderly way with the men ahead of

them, and doing, as they put it, "odd jobs," such as knocking out machine-guns and killing snipers.

It was so with other men. Having done their alloted task they would not stand and hold, but streamed after the tide which went through and past them, determined to be in at the death.

In the attacks upon Geudecourt that day and on the evening of the next they had a hard bad time like the men on their left. They were under enfilade fire from machine-guns, which chattered hour after hour, never silent. "The air was stiff with bullets," says one of the officers. Men finding their only cover in shell-craters could not put their heads up, so close did the bullets slash the earth. And in other shell-craters not far away were many German riflemen picking off any man who appeared for a moment out of the tumbled earth.

It was a hellish neighbourhood, yet when the moment for the second attack came mixed companies of men from various regiments who had mingled in the inevitable confusion of such a place and time (it was now thirty-six hours since the dawn of Friday) rose out of their holes in the earth and formed up as on parade, and went forward in a fine gallant style.

It was impossible in the face of all those bullets about them, and they fell back to the original line of advance well to the north of Flers, which was good enough for that day after such heroic work. There was no Division in our armies who could have done better, nor who did better, on a great day when all did well.

10

And now I must tell a little more in detail the story of the Guards in this battle. It is hard to tell it, and not all can be told yet because of the enemy. The Guards had their full share of the fighting, and of the difficult ground, with strong forces against them. They knew that would be so before they went into battle, and yet they did not ask for better things, but awaited the hour of attack with strong, gallant hearts, quite sure of their courage, proud of their name, full of trust in their officers, eager to give a smashing blow at the enemy.

These splendid men, so tall and proper, so hard and fine, went away as one might imagine the old knights and yeomen of England at Agincourt. For the first time in the history of the

Coldstreamers, three battalions of them charged in line, great solid waves of men, as fine a sight as the world could show. Behind them were the Grenadiers, and again behind these men the Irish.

They had not gone more than 200 yards before they came under the enfilade fire of massed machine-guns in trenches not previously observed. The noise of this fire was so loud and savage that although hundreds of guns were firing, not a shot could be heard. It was just the stabbing staccato hammering of the German Maxims. Men fell, but the lines were not broken. Gaps were made in the ranks, but they closed up. The wounded did not call for help, but cheered on those who swept past and on, shouting, "Go on, Lily-whites!"—which is the old name for the Coldstreamers—"Get at 'em, Lily-whites!"

They went on at a hot pace with their bayonets lowered. Out of the crumpled earth—all pits and holes and hillocks, torn up by great gun-fire—grey figures rose and fled. They were German soldiers terror-stricken by this rushing tide of men.

The Guards went on. Then they were checked by two lines of trenches, wired and defended by machine-guns and bombers. They came upon them quicker than they expected. Some of the officers were puzzled. Could these be the trenches marked out for attack—or other unknown trenches? Anyhow, they must be taken—and the Guards took them by frontal assault full in the face of continual blasts of machine-gun bullets.

There was hard and desperate fighting. The Germans defended themselves to the death. They bombed our men, who attacked them with the bayonet, served their machine-guns until they were killed, and would only surrender when our men were on top of them. It was a very bloody hour or more. By that time the Irish Guards had joined the others. All the Guards were together, and together they passed the trenches, swinging left inevitably under the machine-gun fire which poured upon them from their right, but going steadily deeper into the enemy country until they were 2000 yards from their starting-place.

Then it was necessary to call a halt. Many officers and men had fallen. To go farther would be absolute death. The troops on the right had been utterly held up. The Guards

were "up in the air," with an exposed flank, open to all the fire that was flung upon them from the enemy's lines. The temptation to go farther was great. The German infantry was on the run. They were dragging their guns away. There was a great panic among the men who had been hiding in trenches. But the German machine-gunners kept to their posts to safeguard a rout, and the Guards had gone far enough through their scourging bullets.

They decided very wisely to hold the line they had gained, and to dig in where they stood, and to make forward posts with strong points. They had killed a great number of Germans and taken 200 prisoners and fought grandly. So now they halted and dug and took cover as best they could in shell-craters and broken ground, under fierce fire from the enemy's guns.

The night was a dreadful one for the wounded, and for men who did their best for the wounded, trying to be deaf to agonizing sounds. Many of them had hairbreadth escapes from death. One young officer in the Irish Guards lay in a shell-hole with two comrades, and then left it for a while to cheer up other men lying in surrounding craters. When he came back he found his two friends lying dead, blown to bits by a shell.

But in spite of all these bad hours the Guards kept cool, kept their discipline, their courage, and their spirit. The Germans launched counter-attacks against them, but were annihilated. The Guards held their ground, and gained the greatest honour for self-sacrificing courage which has ever given a special meaning to their name. They took the share which all of us knew they would take in the greatest of all our battles since the first day of July, and, with other regiments, struck a vital blow at the enemy's line of defence.

XXXII

LONDON PRIDE

1

SEPTEMBER 20

ANOTHER dark, wet day, filled with grey mist and rain-storms and mud. Up in the lines British soldiers and Germans lie near each other in shell-craters, waist-high in water. The rain is slashing upon them, and it is cold. But though gunners cannot see, nor airmen fly, the bombardment goes on, and all day long there has been the dull crashing of heavy shells, on both sides deep and sullen boomings through the white fog of this foul day.

Last night and early in the morning the enemy attempted a counter-attack at different parts of the line. They attacked heavily here and there with strong bombing parties, who for a time forced a way into our new lines, at the corner of Courcelette and the north of Martinpuich and the ground farther east.

Many of them were killed—the bad weather does not stop this slaughter—and they were driven out and back again by men who, though cold in their shell-craters, kept their courage and flung themselves fiercely upon the German assaulting troops, in sharp bombing fights, which left us with more ground—at least in one part of the line—than we had before. All of which shows that the enemy is hard pressed and tightly held, and that our men—infantry to infantry—not counting gun-fire, have the mastery of these German reserves, and a spirit that refuses to be beaten even by artillery.

I have written many thousands of words about this abominable war since the first shot was fired, and for fifteen months and more have been trying to picture as closely as possible the life of our soldiers in action, but I am conscious that all I have

written has given but a vague, dim, far-off glimpse of the character, sufferings, and valour of our men.

How is it possible to show these things truly, to make my readers understand something of the truth when I cannot understand myself, but can only guess and grope at the qualities which make them do the things they do? Take our last great day of battle—September 15—there were troops of many different types engaged in its fighting—Canadians, New-Zealanders, Scots, Irish, and English of many counties. One would expect to find differences among these men, to find some harder than others or softer than others, battalions here and there who flinched before the storm of steel and those frightful shells which open great chasms in the earth. But on Friday the courage of all those men was of one quality, and a man would be a liar who said that one set of men were less brave than another.

2

To-day I went among the London men, and afterwards among some Highlanders, who have a special place in my heart. In blood, in upbringing, in physique, in temperament one could not find two bodies of men more unlike, yet they have been alike in splendid endurance under merciless fire last Friday and onwards. "I cannot understand how my boys stuck it out during the worst hours they had," said a colonel of one of the City of London battalions. "They just had to sit in shell-craters under heavy 'crumps.' Many men would not have gone through with it. But the London boys just stayed there, gamely. They are wonderful."

The colonel himself was wonderful—this old Territorial soldier, nearly sixty years of age, with a white moustache and grizzled eyebrows that did not hide the bright and almost boyish light in his eyes. He used to be a dyspeptic and a "bundle of nerves," so he told me, and did not think he could last three months of war. But now at the beginning of the third year of war he led his battalion into action, went under some of the fiercest fire along the whole battle-line with them, and lay side by side with his "boys," as he calls them, in a shell-hole which became filled with water by violent rain-storms. For three days and nights he lay there while the enemy was trying to shell our men to death by his monstrous five-point-nines.

There were London men with him and all around him in the same kind of holes—for there were no trenches here—and though even the sergeants were shaking with a kind of ague, not with cold but after the nervous strain of enduring the incessant shock of high explosives, they "carried on"—oh splendid phrase!—and not a fellow played the coward, though all were very much afraid, as all men are in these frightful hours.

They had been born and bred in London. They had worn black coats and "toppers" in the City—all the officers among them—and the men had been in warehouses and offices and shops down Thames-side and away to Whitehall. They had played the gentle game of dominoes in luncheon hours over a glass of milk and a Bath bun. They had grown nasturtiums in suburban gardens, and their biggest adventure in life had been the summer manœuvres of the dear old "Terriers." And now—they fought through German trenches and lay in shell-holes, and every nerve in their brains and bodies was ravaged by the tumult of shell-fire about them and by the wounded who lay with them. But these Londoners who fight on their nerves were no less staunch than men like the Scots and the North-country lads, who, as far as I can see, have no nerves at all.

3

There were some strange individual adventures in the midst of the general experience of rushing two lines of German trenches through a violent barrage and getting forward to open country, where they dug themselves in. Among ten machine-guns which they captured on their way up there was one handled by a German gunner who awaited his chance to sweep the ranks of the London lads. But he did not get it. An officer of the London Regiment who was carrying a rifle "spotted" the man quickly and killed him with a straight shot before he had fired more than a few bullets. That rifle-shot saved the lives of many of our men.

In the second German trench there was a sharp fight, and one single combat between one of our officers—who happens to be a South African—and a great lusty German who was a much bigger man than ours. It was a bayonet duel as two mediæval knights might have fought in the old days with heavy swords.

Our officer was already wounded twice. He had a bullet through the shoulder, and a damaged jaw. But five times he pierced his enemy with the bayonet. It should have been enough, but the great German still fought. Both bayonets were dropped and the two men closed and wrestled with each other, trying to get a grip of the throat. The German wrestler, bloody as he was, seemed to keep all his brute strength, but he was laid out by a bullet in the neck from a sergeant of the Londoners who came to the rescue of the officer. Afterwards this easy-going gentleman—from South Africa—chatted with his colonel over the body of his man as quietly and calmly as though he were in his smoking-room at home, and paid no attention whatever to his wounds, refusing to go down to the doctor, but going forward again with his men.

Some of the men went too far in their eagerness, away into the "blue." No word came back from them. No signal. Later one man trudged back, bringing two prisoners. "Where are the others?" he was asked. He pointed far away, and said, "Over there." He is the only man who has come back from that place of mystery.

4

Some of the London battalions did not suffer so heavily as might have been expected from the hard task they had, and the wonderful way in which they fought. What loss they suffered was the price of extreme valour. The charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava has been put into song as one of the great heroic tales of history. Will any one make a song of the London men who fought forward through a hurricane of fire?

The stretcher-bearers of the London Territorials did their work nobly, and among them as a volunteer was one German who deserves a word of praise, by men with a sporting spirit, fair to their enemy. He had first been taken prisoner by an officer of ours, who was then hit by a piece of shell or a rifle-bullet. He fell, and could not rise again, but his prisoner, who was an officer too, picked him up and carried him across the battlefield to our dressing-station, and then stood by for an escort to take him away.

The General commanding these London men spoke of them to-day with a thrill in his voice. He had been with them, and had reconnoitred their ground, and had seen their way of

fighting. When I spoke to him he had been witnout sleep and rest for two days and nights. "No men could have done better," he said. "No General could wish to command braver men or better men. Their discipline is splendid. There is never any crime among them. They behave always as gentlemen should behave, and they fight with fine hearts. These London boys of mine had one of the hardest tasks on Friday, and they carried it through with a most gallant spirit."

5

Another day I must write of the Highlanders whom I met to-day—those Gay Gordons of whom I have written several times when I have found them in other parts of the battle-line. Some of them waved hands to me to-day and shouted cheerfully across a track of mud, and, seeing the faces under their bonnets, I was enormously glad to find these old friends of mine alive and well after many days of fighting. Squarer, tougher, harder men than the Londoners, they fought in their own style, gloriously, with all their comrades in kilts or trews who swept across the German lines, and then held their captured ground under infernal fire. One story they told me of the things they have seen is a grim little picture which is etched in my brain.

Two of them went down into a German dug-out and started back when they saw a man seated there at table. The table was laid for a meal, but the food was uneaten. It was a dead German officer who sat before them, as though asleep. The top of the dug-out had been knocked in by one of our shells, and something had fallen and killed him as he was beginning breakfast. The Gordons went into other dug-outs and found other dead bodies, but it was this sitting man that they remember most.

XXXIII

THE SPLENDID NEW-ZEALANDERS

1

SEPTEMBER 23

IT was inevitable that after the great battle of September 15 our line should have ragged edges and run up or down into small salients. This was due to the greater progress made by different bodies of troops; and to the way in which isolated groups of Germans held on very stubbornly to these stretches of ground not in the general line of our advance.

During the past forty-eight hours a good deal has been done to clear out these pockets, or wedges, and to straighten out the line from Courcelette eastwards.

This morning our troops did a useful bit of work in such a place between Courcelette and Martinpuich, knocking out a strong post and taking some prisoners, with whom were two officers. Elsewhere strong posts thrust out by us beyond the main trenches have been linked up, so that the line now runs in a reasonably even way from the north of Courcelette across the Bapaume Road, above Martinpuich, and so on to the north of Flers.

This linking-up and clearing-up work now done to a great extent puts us in a stronger position of defence, to hold what we have gained, against any attempts made by the enemy in counter-attack.

He has made many attempts since September 15 to drive our troops out of the high ground, which is vital to his means of observation, and the failure of them has cost him a great price in life.

2

Among the most desperate thrusts, pressed with stubborn bravery by bodies of German soldiers, collected hastily and

flung with but little plan or preliminary organization against our lines, were those directed upon the New-Zealanders, who repelled them after hard and long conflicts fought out for the most part with naked steel.

In all the fighting since July 1 there has not been anything more fierce or more bloody than these hand-to-hand struggles on the left of Flers, and the New-Zealanders have gained a greater name for themselves (it was already a great name since Gallipoli) as soldiers who hate to give up what they have gained, who will hold on to ground with a grim obstinacy against heavy odds, and if they are ordered to retreat because of the military situation round them come back again with a stern resolve to "get the goods."

That is not only my reading of the men, and I do not pretend to know them well, but is the summing-up of an officer, not from their own country, who has seen them fight during these last few days, and who spoke of them with a thrill of admiration in his voice, after watching the stoicism with which they endured great shell-fire, the spirit with which they attacked after great fatigues and hardships, and the rally of men, discouraged for a while by their loss of officers which swept the Germans back into panic-stricken flight.

This struggle covers a week's fighting since September 15, when at dawn the New-Zealanders advanced in waves to a series of positions which would bring them up to the left of Flers if they had the luck to get as far. On their right were the troops, whose capture of Flers village I have already described, and on their left other troops attacking High Wood and the ground north of it.

The men of New Zealand went forward with hardly a check to the German switch-trench 500 yards from the starting-line. They were men of Auckland, Canterbury, Otago, and Wellington, and they put their trust in the bayonet and desired to get close to their enemy.

They had their desire. In the switch-trench the Germans defended themselves to the last gasp, and, as far as I can make out, only four of them were left alive after that frightful encounter. It was a fight to the death on both sides, and the New-Zealanders did not cross that ditch at full strength.

On the way up they lost under shrapnel and machine-gun fire. On the other side of the ditch their lines were thinner.

But they were on the other side, and the ditch behind them was a grave upon which they turned their backs to get across the next stretch of ground to trenches 800 yards ahead.

The New Zealand Rifles covered this ground quickly, moving in open order, but keeping in touch with each other by fine discipline and an esprit de corps which is better than discipline.

3

That next system of trench-work, two lines heavily wired and deeply dug, part of the famous Flers line, was a great obstacle. Our gun-fire, grand as it had been, had not laid all the wire low nor destroyed the trenches. A swish of machine-gun bullets showed that the enemy was alive and savage.

An infantry assault on such a line had to be paid for, sometimes by a great number of dead and wounded. But it was the day of the Tanks. Two of them had tried to keep pace with the New Zealand attack, but had lagged behind like short-winded creatures suffering from stitch—and no wonder, looking at the shell-craters and pits across which they had to bring their long bodies, crawling in and crawling out, with their tails above their heads and their heads above their tails.

But they arrived in time to attack the Flers line, and in a very deliberate and stolid way they sidled along the barbed wire, smashing it into the earth, before poking their big snouts over the German parapets, hauling themselves up, and firing from both flanks upon German machine-gun teams.

With this noteworthy help, which saved time and trouble and life, the New-Zealanders took the double trenches of the Flers line, and again pushed on, another 700 yards, across a sunken road with steep banks and very deep dug-outs, where the enemy did not stay to meet them until they had established themselves on a line running westwards from the top of Flers village, now in the hands of our English lads.

One of the Tanks followed them, getting down the steep bank with its nose to earth, and lumbering up the other side like a huge elephant (without a trunk).

A German battery 1500 yards away searched for it with shell-fire, but did not get within hitting distance of its armoured skin. Eventually it was the German battery that was knocked out by our guns.

However, this was a side-show, and the Tanks must not take all the glory away from the infantry, who had not armoured skins, alas, and who were facing murderous fire elsewhere.

4

They had been ordered to swing left to make a flanking front up the edge of a valley running north-west of Flers, right away beyond the village, and this they did most gallantly, although at the time they stuck out like a thin wedge into German territory, because at that time they had no support on their left (our English fellows, as I have described in an earlier dispatch, had been having a fearful time in and beyond High Wood), and on the right the other English troops were busy with the capture of Flers.

It was clearly and undeniably a hazardous position for the New-Zealanders all alone out there, and they were ordered to fall back to the line going straight westwards from the top of Flers village, which they helped to hold on the night of the 15th to 16th.

From that day onwards the enemy made repeated counter-attacks. Sometimes they were in feeble strength, shattered quickly, but they grew in intensity and numbers as the days passed, while the New-Zealanders were still in a rather precarious position, "a rocky position," says one of their officers, owing to the weakness of their left flank.

Right down on that flank Germans were still holding out in shell-craters with a way open behind them, so that supports might come down to drive a wedge between the New-Zealanders and the English troops north of High Wood.

This was attempted by something like a brigade of Germans, who advanced in six or seven waves upon the English soldiers—who were outnumbered by more than two to one—in a steady, determined way. They were met out in the open with the bayonet. It was the old way of fighting men meeting men, staring into each other's eyes, trusting to their own strength and skill with sharp steel, and not to engines of war with high explosives or quick-firing guns.

If men fight it is the best way though not pleasant and agreeable for ladies to watch from silken canopies, as in the old days of the tourney, when gentlemen hacked at each other

with axes, just for fun. A New Zealand officer watched it from a little distance, and his breath came quick when he described it to me. The German ranks were broken and a remnant fled.

But it was not so long or so bloody a fight as what the New-Zealanders themselves had to encounter three days ago.

The enemy struck a blow against the New Zealand troops, at the joining-point between those men and their comrades on the left, who had come up to the west of Flers.

The New-Zealanders—who were Canterbury men—were beaten back twice, and twice regained the ground. All through the night of September 20 until the dawn of the 21st there was violent bomb-fighting and bayonet-fighting.

There was no straight line of men, British on one side, German on the other. It was a confused mass, isolated bodies of men struggling around shell-craters and bits of trench, single figures fighting twos and threes, groups joining to form lines which surged backwards and forwards and a night horrible with the crash of bombs and the cries of the dying.

5

One New Zealand officer, a very splendid heroic man, was the life and soul of this defence and counter-attack.

There were moments when some of his men were disheartened because their line had fallen back, and the number of their wounded lay too thick about them. He put new fire into them by the flame of his own spirit. He led them forward again, rallying the gloomy ones, so careless of his own life, so eager for the honour of New Zealand that they followed him under a kind of spell, because of the magic in him.

They thrust back the enemy, put him to flight down the valley, remained masters of the ground when the dawn brightened into the full light of day, revealing the carnage that had been hidden in the night.

It was not the end of the fighting here. In the afternoon the enemy came again, in strong numbers—sent forward by their high command, men at the end of far telephones, desperate to retake the ground, and ordering new assaults which were sentences of death to German soldiers not at the end of far telephones but very near to British bayonets.

They came on thickly, these doomed men, shoulder to shoulder, and it was again the captain of the Canterburys who led his men against them in a great bayonet charge, right across the open.

It was bayonet against bayonet, for the Germans stood to receive the charge, though with blanched faces. For the New-Zealanders came upon them at the trot and then sprang forward with bayonets as quick as knitting-needles. . . .

The Germans cried out in terror. Down the hill-side, beyond, those who could escape ran, and fell as they ran. It was a rout and the end of the counter-attack.

The New-Zealanders were now sure of themselves. They knew that with the bayonet they can meet the Germans as their masters. So scornful are they of their bayonet-fighting that they have it in their hearts to pity them and say, "Poor devils!"

To my mind, and to others, the finest heroism was shown by the New Zealand stretcher-bearers. They did not charge with the bayonet. All their duty was to go out across open country in cool blood to pick up men lying there in blood that was not cool unless they had lain there too long.

They had to go through salvos of five-point-nines, which tore up the ground about them, and buried them, and mangled many of them. And they went quite steadily and quietly, not once or twice, but hour after hour, until more than sixty of them had fallen, and hour after hour they carried out their work of rescue quite careless of themselves.

"I am not a sentimentalist," said a New Zealand officer to-day, as he looked at me with grave eyes, remembering those scenes, "but the work of those men seemed to me very noble and good."

In New Zealand and in the quiet farmsteads there, those words will be read gladly, I think.

And if any words of mine could give a little extra share of honour to these Colonial boys, who have come so far overseas to fight by the side of English soldiers, I should be glad and proud too, having a heart very full of admiration for the valour of these men, who have fought in these great battles as well as any troops who shared the day with them.

XXXIV

THE CANADIANS AT COURCELETTE

I

SEPTEMBER 24

IN a scrappy way I have told something about the way the Canadians fought for Courcelette. It is worth more than that as an historic narrative. From first to last, beginning with the dawn of Friday, September 15, and going on now, beyond the village, against German counter-attacks, these men from the West have shown themselves very gallant, and hard and quick in fighting qualities.

There was a body of French-Canadians among them, dark-eyed fellows, of the same type as the French people among whom they found themselves by the odd chance of fate, like some of the French Chasseurs Alpins who have been fighting on our right, lithe-bodied men, with muscles like whipcord, full of individual character, and an old tradition of warfare behind them, war against nature and wild animals, away from town life.

The enemy was not sure what men he had against him down below Courcelette. I think it was to get this knowledge that he sent out a number of his bombers just before the Canadian attack was to be launched. I have already told about the sergeant who saw them coming, and about the boy by his side who was buried alive by a shell, and lived to tell me the tale with a strange smile in his brown eyes, as he leaned on a crooked stick, some old tree-stump he had picked up to support him when he was weak from loss of blood. He was one of the French-Canadian boys. The German bombers came out of the darkness suddenly, and pounced upon a bit of trench, flinging their hand-grenades, and trying to grab some of our men as prisoners. It was just like one of the old raids, better done by the Canadians

themselves. They had a short innings, and not a man went back. A Canadian machine-gunner rushed up to his "Lewis" and killed those who came over our parapets. One officer with twelve bombers accounted for the others.

But it was awkward happening just at the hour when the grand attack was waiting for the word "Go." It might have disorganized the plan at the outset. The Canadians did not let it make any kind of difference to them. At the exact moment all the waves of men rose, swept over the dead bodies of the raiders, and in a great tide rolled over No Man's Land. Three Tanks went with them, slower than the infantry, but climbing steadily over the trenches and the shell-craters, and prowling around for the places from which there came a spitting fire of machine-guns. They found some of them in the sugar factory, and I have told how they sat down there, crumpling the emplacements under their heavy ribs, and pouring out a deadly fire.

2

The Canadian infantry had a difficult operation. The ground from the high ridge of Pozières sloped down before them to the edge of the village of Courcelette, where they had been ordered to halt and consolidate while reserve battalions —the French-Canadians on the right—came up behind to "mop-up" the captured ground. A German trench ran at an angle from their objective, and as they advanced the Canadians had to take this "en passant," as chess-players would say, the flank capturing the trench at the same rate of progress as the centre and right went forward.

It was done. Through machine-gun fire and an inferno of shrapnel and high explosives the Canadians stormed their way down the slope, shouting and cheering as they went, led by officers who urged them on, before falling, some of them, mortally wounded. In the trenches the German soldiers fought stubbornly, flinging their bombs and maintaining a rapid rifle-fire until the Canadians were right upon them with the bayonet. At the sight of sharp steel they fought no more, but flung up their hands.

The Canadians had a long way to go to the outskirts of Courcelette, right across open country, and as they went the German "crumps" fell among them, tossing up great masses

—as large as village churches—of smoke and earth filled with flying shell-splinters.

It was on the line outside Courcelette that they stopped at last to dig and gather their strength and take breath. It was late in the afternoon, I think, that the ground behind them was thoroughly cleared, and that the German defence of the sugar factory was finally broken with the help of the Tanks. There was a conference between the officers, those who were still unwounded. Men in the ranks asked the same question, and answered it. "Why not take Courcelette itself?"

8

The order and the honour of the new attack was given to the "mop-up" battalions behind, with the French Canadians among them, who had been advancing behind the assaulting troops as a clearing and consolidating force. The colonel of the French-Canadians tells the story. He is a wiry man, typical of his race, modest, bright-eyed, keeping a sense of humour in spite of all the tragedy of war, such a man as Chaucer knew when Norman-French was spoken in English fields—"a very parfit gentil knight."

He is proud of his French-Canadians. They had a long way to go to get to Courcelette. Nearly three and a half miles to the final line given to them on the other side of the village. "We're late, we're late," said the little colonel. "We must get there in time at whatever cost. French-Canadians, forward!"

They were not too late. They came up to the first assaulting battalions—those who had dug in south of the village—just in time to pass through them and lead the new attack. Many men had dropped on the way. The ground was still being torn up by steel ploughs. All the air was full of the scream and whine and crash of shells. Round Courcelette there was a clatter of machine-gun fire from German hiding-places. The garrison there was ready for defence.

"Allons donc, mes enfants!"

It is the way in which French officers lead their men to victory or to death.

The French-Canadians, with their comrades on the left, swung round in a loop round the southern half of the village,

and closed in and invaded its streets. . . . The capture of Courcelette was one of the astounding things in this battle of the Somme. There were 1500 Germans in and about it, and the place was stormed by much less than that number. Dug-outs full of Germans were routed out by a few men who could have been crushed and killed by the odds against them. One Canadian boy went down into a dug-out, and after a time—what queer conversation could he have down there?—came out again with prisoners. There were twenty of them, tall, big men, who could have made a meal off this brown-eyed lad who marshalled them up.

Some of the Germans made themselves useful. A wounded Canadian officer captured five of them before too weak to get back to the dressing-station unaided. Speaking French to them, which one at least understood, he ordered his prisoners to make a stretcher for him, enforcing his command by keeping his revolver on them. From some old sticks and sandbags they made the stretcher, and then carried him down.

Two German doctors helped to dress our wounded, and worked bravely and steadily under shell-fire for many hours. One of them objected to having a sentry put near his dug-out. "I am not a fighting man," he said. "I did not help to make this war. My work is for humanity, and your wounded are the same to me as ours, poor, suffering men, needing my help, which I am glad to give."

4

Beyond the village that night the enemy made seven counter-attacks upon the Canadians. There were moments when even the colonel thought that things did not look "too bright." But all these assaults were beaten off, as the Canadians have beaten off other attacks yesterday and to-day, inflicting heavy losses and gaining more ground.

One counter-attack was repulsed by a handful of men in a way that gives a grotesque comedy to all this night scene of war filled with so much death and terror, and human courage strong in endurance. A tot of rum had been served out to each Canadian to give a glow of warmth to limbs chilled in the wet soil of shell-craters and to hearts chilled by the reaction which follows fierce excitement. This handful of men were sitting in a German dug-out.

They laughed and sang, forgetful of the scenes about them. It was as jolly as in a log-cabin of the West, by this dug-out, where a corpse lay very quiet. Again they shouted and laughed more loudly, giving Red Indian war-cries, and other wild whoops. And that was when the counter-attack began.

It did not get very far. A body of Germans advancing over No Man's Land to the British lines suddenly heard frightful, blood-curdling sounds. It was as though the tribes of the Blackfeet had come out upon the war-path, yelling as they swung their tomahawks and dancing round the scalps of their victims. The Germans hated to hear such a noise. It was as though all the devils of hell were upon them, laughing diabolically. . . . They turned and fled.

XXXV

THE ABANDONMENT OF COMBLES

1

SEPTEMBER 26

THE enemy cannot stand against us on his present line. That has been proved to-day and yesterday by sweeping British successes, which include the capture of Geudecourt, Lesbœufs, Morval, and Combles, with nearly 2000 prisoners (according to my own reckoning) and a great mass of material. The German infantry was ordered to hold on to these places at all costs, to the very death.

The enemy may pretend later that they have made a voluntary withdrawal to " take up a new and stronger line of defence " —that is the usual convention—but I have talked with their officers and men and know what their orders were. They were to fight for every inch of soil against us, and they did not lack courage.

But our men and our guns have been too strong for them. As soon as we held the high ridge from the Pozières Windmill through the old German switch-line below Martinpuich, and above High Wood and Ginchy, their position down the slopes became untenable because of the new observation we had for our artillery.

One by one their strongholds have fallen, Courcelette and Martinpuich and Flers, now those other places, Geudecourt, Lesbœufs, and Morval. In spite of all their massed machine-guns in strong emplacements, and all their tunnelled dug-outs, and all their stubborn resistance, they could not hold on to a line here under the hurricane of fire our guns have flung upon them, and the tide of men who swept forward and overwhelmed them.

Their defence began to show signs of cracking when they

were unable to force home their repeated counter-attacks by any big general scheme of offence.

It was clear that our constant hammer-strokes, with those delivered by the French on our right, had demoralized and disorganized them, and that they were unable to gather reserves from other parts of the line quick enough or big enough to strike back heavily so as to thwart our progress. They had to rely mainly on their gun-power, and formidable as that is it has been mastered by ours for the time being, and could not do more than make our advance costly to our wonderful infantry, who went through its curtain-fire.

Even that has weakened a little during the past forty-eight hours—our men who come back broken by it will not think so, poor fellows—and the last attacks have succeeded with far fewer casualties on our side than ever before on such a day of success in this battle of the Somme. The casualties, indeed, were very light considering the striking successes gained. The enemy is in retreat—not for a great distance, perhaps, but certainly retreating.

2

For the first time in the history of this war on the Western front since the battle of the Marne and the beginning of trench-warfare the enemy has been compelled to abandon a town without a fight in it. He has withdrawn from Combles, which is a place of some importance, and more than a mere village, and our troops have entered it from the north, while the French hold the southern half.

As soon as Morval was taken yesterday, after that wonderful assault upon the double line of trenches defending it, his gunners near Sailly-Saillisel, to the east, packed up and bolted away. In the night troops holding the ground between Morval and that place have melted away, and our patrols are out there trying to find out his rear-guard.

Between Geudecourt and Lesbœufs a body of German infantry tried to rally up to a counter-attack and came forward a little way with a show of strength and resolution.

Our gunners were quick to get their target. Clouds of shrapnel burst over those massed men, and their attack turned into a panic-stricken rout. They flung down rifles and packs

and fled back towards Le Transloy, leaving many dead and wounded in their wake.

The worst thing that has happened to the enemy is the breaking-up of the "moral" of his troops. These men have been ordered to hold out in death-traps, and although there can be no slur on their courage, for they have fought well and are brave men, they have seen with dismal eyes that if they hold on longer they must die or be taken.

As soon as our men had swept across the trenches and the sunken roads where the Germans defended themselves stubbornly and entered the villages—Morval being taken from the north—the garrisons came up out of their underground places and surrendered in heaps. They could have fought longer and harder here, perhaps, but only with their backs to the walls asking for death. They had not the spirit to do that and no man would expect it of them.

They were done and dazed by the appalling intensity of the shell-fire which we had smashed over their tunnels. They were disheartened by the unfailing regularity with which the British had captured one stronghold after another since July 1, and at last after two years of utter confidence in the supreme strength of the German war-machine, their faith had been destroyed.

They have seen it crack and break, leaving them as the victims of its failure. Men who have lost faith in the one idol to which they had pledged their souls are not so strong as before. It is this loss of faith among her soldiers which is the worst thing that has happened to Germany.

3

In opposition to the faith which we have now broken is the fear they have of British troops whom, once upon a time, they were taught to despise, they are stupefied by the grim way in which our men attack, reckless of loss, so that no barrage stops them, and they are amazed that men who were not soldiers a year ago should now be equal to their own best troops in fighting skill as gunners and as infantry.

A German officer who surrendered to-day with a whole company when the British stormed their way into Morval paid a tribute to them when he was taken prisoner.

"Your soldiers," he said, "surprise me by their sang-froid. They were very cool and calm in moments when most soldiers would lose their heads."

He was touched, too, by their kindness to him, puzzled by it, not finding any kind of hatred in their hearts now that the fighting was over.

"They asked me whether I would like to go down at once or wait until the barrage eased off. That was very good-natured of them. Then they gave me 'küchen'—little cakes—and called me 'old boy' as though they had known me before."

They are grateful for our treatment of them, and truly some of our men are chivalrous in the way they behave to them after the bloodshed is over and the fierce and frightful things of battle.

There were two fellows on the roadside to-day, an English soldier and a German, trudging side by side to a field dressing-station. Both heads were bandaged, and one man could see out of one eye and one out of the other.

Said the Englishman :

"This chap tried to gouge out my eye with his fist, and I did the same to his with my elbow, and now we get on famously together."

Two other men came in—enemies an hour before.

"This is Old Bill," said the English soldier, pointing to a wounded German. "Where I go Bill goes. I wounded him and I took him. . . . Come on, Bill, old son."

I saw 1200 German prisoners to-day just out of the battle. They lay in rows, grey body close to grey body, so that when any stood and walked about they had to step carefully over all those lying men. They were men from Morval and Lesbœufs, and some from Combles, who in the retreat in the night had mistaken their way out and come into our lines.

They were mostly strong, well-built young men—better than some of those I saw yesterday—and were nearly all Prussians from the Rhinelands. In the mass there was nothing repulsive about them, though here and there was an evil-looking face. These fresh-coloured fellows, very smart and soldierly, and with very little of the dirt of war upon them, as they had been living in the dug-outs, stared about them with curious eyes—at the British troops passing and British transports, and all the traffic that goes up to the battle-lines. They were startled

at finding themselves in so great a company of fellow-prisoners. They confessed to one of our officers that it was "a great British victory."

These men were all unwounded. But in a tent not far away, and in other tents, were rows of Germans on stretchers, lying very still, and looking very grey, in blood-soaked clothes. Some of them were moaning their lives away, but English doctors were with them, attending to them just in the same way as they dealt with our wounded men carried into other tents.

"We make no difference," said the medical officer.

There was a young officer there whom I had met yesterday on the roadside. He sat up when he saw me again, and said he wanted nothing that could be given to him, and was grateful for the treatment. He had just been writing down the address of one of his wounded comrades, who was going to die, so that he might send a letter to the man's wife. He had been asked to do this by one of the English doctors, and he was glad to do it.

I sat down by the side of a young soldier from the Rhineland.

"Are you badly wounded?" I asked.

He pointed to his shoulder, and said, "Here."

When I said he looked very young, he shrugged that wounded shoulder of his, and said, "All my comrades were young. We fought as well as older men. The English came behind us, or we would not have been taken."

The pride of the boy remained with him even now, and it seemed to me fine and plucky.

But these men, as a whole, have none of the braggart confidence of the prisoners we used to take a year ago. The truth, I think, is beginning to dawn upon them. The guns that protected them have been matched by British guns, and the new army that has grown up against them has broken their strongest lines.

It is only the beginning. People at home must not think that the German army has lost its power of defence and that the great rout is at hand. They are drawing back their guns, but saving most of them. They are retreating, but will stand again, and dig new trenches and defend other villages.

There will be greater and fiercer and more desperate fighting before the end comes, and God alone knows when that will be.

But so far as the fighting goes it is a real stroke of victory for us. Within the last forty-eight hours we have put out of action eight German battalions between Lesbœufs and Morval, and the enemy can ill afford such loss after all that has happened since the first day of July.

4

The story of the meeting of the French and British in the stronghold of Combles is an historic incident, which may form one day the subject of a great painting, though perhaps no artist's eye was there to see it. Some brigades of English troops were holding, on Monday morning, the ground of the Quadrilateral (where our men had been badly held up on September 15), to the west of Bouleaux Wood.

The French were hammering forward with their soixante-quinze and masses of splendid infantry to the east of Combles in the direction of Frégicourt. The plan of attack was to box in Combles by the French advance on one side, and on ours by forming a strong line to the north-west of Combles.

The operation was of great importance to the whole of our attack on Morval and Lesbœufs on Monday morning, because, apart from cutting off Combles, the new position was needed as a solid plank to our right wing.

The men who were given the task—it is sad that I am not yet able to say who they were—had been fighting heavily in previous battles, and had suffered many losses. But for this new assault they rallied up again with a brave spirit, and did all that was asked of them and a little more.

Instead of attacking Bouleaux Wood itself, where the Germans were in great force, they were ordered to take two lines of trenches on the west side of it, and to establish the flank line there—a clever bit of strategy which a German officer has since complained of bitterly as "not playing the game," because at Bouleaux Wood the Germans were waiting for an attack and ready for it with massed machine-guns, which they could not put to their full use, poor lads!

The trenches were taken easily and rapidly—in five minutes from the moment of attack—but nearly at right angles to them was an embankment with a rabbit-warren of dug-outs, which gave more trouble.

It was the German flank line, and enormously important to

the enemy, so that he held it with a large force of men and many machine-guns and "minenwerfer."

Fierce, savage fighting took place here, and it was only four hours later that the dug-outs were finally cleared. Hereabouts eighty prisoners were taken, but a great many dead bodies lay below the embankment when the fight was done.

Near by five "minenwerfer" were captured, and our men found some empty gun-emplacements, which had been abandoned in such a hurry by the German gunners that they had left behind them a great store of four-point-two shells and all their ammunition-carriers.

Our strong flank was formed and a new trench dug in great style by a pioneer battalion, and then in the darkness patrols of infantry pushed forward in the direction of Combles. It was dark, yet not an absolute and lasting darkness. The sky was very calm and strewn with bright stars, and up above the Combles road at Morval white flares went up and down, throwing every few moments a white, vivid glare over the battlefield, lighting up its desolation, with the rim of every shell-crater white as snow and with black pits in the depths of them.

The sky was not quiet except high above the strife of men. Away down the French lines it was all on fire, and shells were bursting in a great semicircle where the British were fighting at Lesbœufs and Geudecourt.

But Combles was dark and quiet. No star-shells came up from its ruined houses. There was no sign of life there, only a few black shadows came up from the town towards our patrols and exchanged shots with them and then tried to escape. Twenty of these stragglers were taken prisoner. Ten were killed in fights with our patrol parties.

Hour after hour there was the tremendous tattoo of the French soixante-quinze coming nearer and nearer, and a final outburst of gun and rifle-fire when Frégicourt was taken.

The night was passing, but it was long before dawn—at 3.15—when a strong patrol of English soldiers with machine-guns advanced down a tram-line into the town of Combles. They were tired men, worn with fighting, craving sleep, hating all this hell around them, not in that night hour inspired by any thrill of joy because they were entering Combles "in triumph." They were not quite sure how far the beastly

place had been abandoned. News had come to them that the enemy had found a way out.

But you never can tell. There might be desperate fellows in the cellars, machine-guns behind any of these broken walls. They went on slowly and cautiously until they reached the ruined streets.

Dead men lay about, with white faces turned upwards to the stars. The ground was littered with broken bricks and twisted iron and destroyed wagons. But no shot came through the gaping holes in houses which still stood as roofless shells. It was all as quiet and still as death. A halt was made at the railway line, and then our tired men saw through the gloom other tired figures trudging towards them.

Officers went forward. Words were spoken in French and English:

"Ce sont les Anglais."

"Them's the French all right."

"The blooming town's abandoned."

"Les sacrés Boches n'existent plus!"

Combles was taken thus in the early hours of the morning of the day before yesterday without any demonstration or dramatic ceremony, without cheers or theatrical nonsense, by grim, quiet, tired men who were glad to be at the end of another day's fighting, with a dog's chance of rest.

It was a great place for booty. The cellars were stacked with thousands of rifles and a great store of ammunition. The enemy had left behind four thousand rounds of five-point-nine shells—the less to fire at us, thank God!—and a mass of material and kit of every kind.

This flight from Combles is the most ignominious thing that has happened to the enemy on the Western front since he was hammered back on the Marne, and it must have hurt his pride—the pride of his "High Command"—as a smarting wound.

XXXVI

THE DOOM OF THIÉPVAL

1

SEPTEMBER 27

THE doom of Thiépval is fulfilled. That place upon the high ridge, with its thirty-four black tree-stumps—I counted them this morning—which has been harrowed and ploughed and cratered under incessant storms of high explosive, fell into our hands last evening—all but one corner to the north-west, which is ours to-day.

Weeks ago I said—as it may be remembered—that the German garrison there must have known that their doom was creeping nearer, and that sooner or later they must surrender or die.

It was longer reaching them than I expected when I watched the attack on the Zollern Trench, and the defences running up to the "Wunderwerk," and saw our men crossing a w de stretch of No Man's Land through great shell-fire which tossed up the earth about them, and go on until those who had not fallen leapt upon the German trenches and bundled back batches of prisoners, and then went on again until they were very near to the row of apple-trees which used to blossom in April on the outskirts of Thiépval town perched upon the hill.

It seemed to me then, watching the rapid progress of our men and their wonderful courage, that in a few days more from the Wunderwerk and Mouquet Farm on the east side our lines would close in and put the strangle-grip upon the place.

It has taken longer than that, more storms of shells, more splendid lives, to win the stronghold, and the wonder to me is, now that I know the full strength of the place, the resistance of its underground fortificatoins and the fighting spirit of the

troops holding it, that we captured it yesterday and to-day with such little loss.

For our loss was amazingly light considering the long and stubborn fighting there and the machine-gun fire which swept upon our men from many hidden places, and the desperation of the garrison, who defended themselves with great gallantry. Let us give them the honour of saying that, for they were fine fighting men.

In defence the advantage was all with them. But for the power of our guns and the way in which British troops fight—meaning to win whatever the cost—they were in an impregnable position. The taking of Mouquet Farm by the Australians and afterwards by the Canadians was the worst menace to them, enclosing them on the right, but an astounding episode which happened yesterday will show most clearly the difficulties of our troops and the cunning of the enemy's earthworks.

2

It is many days since I reported the final capture of Mouquet Farm, after in-and-out fighting, and since I saw its ruins from the high ridge.

These bits of broken brickwork, all that was left after the Australians had made it their own, were the remnants of a place more important once than an ordinary French farmstead.

It was a series of buildings such as one finds in France attached to a big château, with barns and outhouses and stables, or to an old monastic institution, covering a large space of ground.

Our last line of trenches struck through the middle of the place, leaving two bits of ruin to the north of the trench and one to the south, behind the line. The enemy seemed to be well away northwards in the shell-craters beyond our parapet, and nobody suspected "Brother Boche" near at hand.

It was with great surprise a few days ago that one of our English officers saw two Germans rise suddenly from a hole behind our line, near the southern ruin of bricks.

One of them beckoned to him. "Be careful, sir," said the sentry. But the officer imagined that the two Germans had strayed into our lines and wanted to be taken prisoner, as some do from time to time.

He went forward slowly until he was quite close to them. Then he fell dead, shot by the man who had beckoned to him, who with his comrade disappeared immediately into some hole which could not be found.

A day or two later a working party digging in the neighbourhood broke through to a deep tunnel. Instead of searching it there and then they filled it up again. Our men found themselves being sniped from other holes in the ground. It came into the heads of our officers that beneath the ground, even behind our lines, were nests of Germans who might turn upon them at any moment, or blow them up by a charge of guncotton.

Orders were given to draw back a little from Mouquet Farm, and the guns were turned on to it again, flinging high explosives and shrapnel over the place, as in the old days. Then some of our men were sent forward to clear the trenches, if they could find them. They came back without success. So the place remained one of our "mystery corners" until yesterday, when the attack was to begin on Thiépval, from the trenches south, and swinging left from Mouquet. It was dangerous, but it was decided to carry out the attack without worrying about the underground inhabitants.

The attack on Thiépval began, and immediately our men on the right had advanced beyond the farm to the Zollern Trench parties of grey-coats came out of the tunnels of Mouquet and began firing machine-guns into the backs of the British soldiers.

By good luck there was a young British officer not far away who kept his head on his shoulders, and had a quick way of dealing with a situation of this kind. He was in charge of a working party, but he saw his chance of a "scrap." "Come on, boys!" he shouted. "Never mind your shovels." His men threw down their tools and followed him.

I don't know how many there were of them, but only thirteen came back. They did not come back ingloriously. They brought with them one German officer and fifty-five men as prisoners, and there were no living men left at six o'clock last night in the tunnels of Mouquet.

It was only a small episode in the rear of the assault on Thiépval, but extraordinary, and not without importance, on the right wing of our advance, for men do not like to go forward with

machine-gun fire from behind. It shows the way in which the ground all about here has been used for subterranean fighting.

8

So it was in Thiépval. Above-ground there was nothing to see to-day, and for a long time, but the black and broken tree-trunks with their lopped branches high above Thiépval Wood, which is just as utterly destroyed—those bare poles, and to the left a mass of reddish brickwork which was once Thiépval Château, and, standing solitary, a queer-shaped monster, looking like a sleeping megatherium, which I recognized as an old Tank on the warpath.

No men could have remained alive above-ground yesterday when our guns hurled upon it a stream of heavy shells which burst all over the site of the village with violent upheavals of earth and vast clouds of curly black smoke filled with death.

The German garrison kept below, in a long series of vaults and tunnels which they had strengthened and linked up, and dug deeper, in a way that would have surprised the old French farmers who used to keep their wine and stores down there centuries ago They had made many exits, so that they could pop up with rifles and machine-guns at many spots between the four corners of the village, and they were ready for another British attack.

I know these things because I have been talking with the German survivors of the garrison. They were nearly all men of the 180th Regiment, and they have held Thiépval for two years.

"In the old days," said one of them this morning—he talked very frankly to me in excellent French—"the place was quiet and happy. We had no great comfort below-ground, no fancy furniture or fine decorations (our beds were just wooden planks raised above the ground); but we worked hard to fortify the vaults. We pierced many new tunnels. We made this underground world perfectly safe, and we were proud of it."

It belonged so much to the 180th Regiment that instead of being relieved in the ordinary way like other troops, and sent off to different parts of the front, they were given the honour of

defending Thiépval since the beginning of the battles of the Somme. The regiment arranged its own reliefs company by company, Bapaume being their rest-camp. The men I met to-day had been actually in Thiépval only seven days, without relief, and had guessed that it would be their turn to defend the place against a great English assault. They had pledged themselves to defend it to the death.

Before telling the narrative of our attack and the adventures of our own men I think it is interesting to give this glimpse of the defenders, of their life underground. When I talked with them this morning they had just been captured. I was struck by the superior bearing and intelligence of them all.

They were certainly the best type of Germans I have seen on this front—Würtembergers all, and handsome fellows, who had kept their spirit—one of the last groups of men who fought against us in the early days, and survivors of the first-line troops of the German army who have fallen like autumn leaves upon the battlefields of Europe, in the endless massacre of this war.

They are weary of the war, like all their troops. They laughed when I asked, "Will England win?" and would not pretend that Germany is still victorious. They had heard of the downfall of the two Zeppelins in England, "Kaput," as they called it, and had all the news that is given to German people by the newspapers which they had every day—even yesterday!—in their underground dwelling-place at Thiépval. But they were not dupes of false news.

"Do you believe the British Fleet is destroyed?" I asked, testing them. "The English Fleet is too great to be destroyed," they said. "We did not believe all those stories. But we gave you a good fight at sea."

They gave us a good fight on land and underground, this garrison of Thiépval, and with a few exceptions they fought honourably, so that our men have no grudge against them now that they are prisoners of war.

4

Our attack began yesterday at half-past twelve after a great bombardment that had been continuous for twenty-four

hours, rising to infernal heights of shell-fire. Our men leapt out of their trenches to the south of the trees, just north of the "Wunderwerk," and advanced in waves up to the trench by the row of apple-trees, the right wing swinging round, as I have said, from Mouquet.

It was on the left that the men had the hardest time. One battalion leading the assault had to advance directly upon the château, that heap of red rubbish, and from cellars beneath it came waves of savage machine-gun fire. They were also raked by an enfilade fire of machine-guns from the left top corner of the ground where the village once stood.

Our men were astounded.

"I didn't believe it possible," said one of them, "that any living soul could be there after all that shell-fire. But blessed as soon as it switched off if the Germans didn't come up like rabbits out of bunny-holes and fire most hellishly."

For a long time it was impossible to get near the château or take a trench dug in front of it. It was a château once belonging to a German. French gossip said that he had tunnelled it for such a defence as that of yesterday, which is a fantastic tale, but its cellars stood now, and were a strong place from which one party of the garrison poured out a stream of lead.

"Where are the old Tanks?" shouted our men, and stared back to catch a glimpse of them.

It is splendid to see the smiles spreading over our men's faces every time they talk of the Tank. Whatever their sufferings have been they cheer up and laugh in a comical way at this thought, for the Tank is a wonderfully fine tonic to the spirits of our men and an outrageous comedy thrusting a blunt nose into the grim business of this fighting.

A Tank had been coming along slowly in a lumbering way, crawling over the interminable succession of shell-craters, lurching over and down into and out of old German trenches, nosing heavily into soft earth, and grunting up again, and sitting poised on broken parapets as though quite winded by this exercise, and then waddling forward in the wake of the infantry. Then it faced the ruins of the château, and stared at them very steadily for quite a long time, as though wondering whether it should eat them or crush them. Our men were hiding behind ridges of shell-craters, keeping low from the

swish of machine-gun bullets, and imploring the Tank to "get on with it."

Then it moved forward, in a monstrous way, not swerving much to the left or right, but heaving itself on jerkily, like a dragon with indigestion, but very fierce. Fire leapt from its nostrils. The German machine-guns splashed its sides with bullets, which ricochetted off. Not all those bullets kept it back. It got on top of the enemy's trench, trudged down the length of it, laying its sandbags flat and sweeping it with fire.

The German machine-guns were silent, and when our men followed the Tank, shouting and cheering, they found a few German gunners standing with their hands up as a sign of surrender to the monster who had come upon them.

"We couldn't have faced the château without the help of the old Tank," said several men. "It didn't care a damn for machine-guns. It did them in properly."

Unfortunately the great grasshopper got into trouble with some part of its mysterious anatomy, and had to rest before crawling home to its lair, so that the rest of the fighting in Thiépval was without this powerful support, and our infantry faced many other machine-guns alone.

5

I suppose only Ovillers can rank with Thiépval for long and close fighting. Our men had to tackle an underground foe, who fired at them out of holes and crevices while they remained hidden.

They had to burrow for them, dive down into dark entries, fight in tunnels, get their hands about the throats of men who suddenly sprang up to them out of the earth.

"I went down into some of those deep dug-outs," said one boy, "but ran back again every time I saw Germans there. Some of them wanted to surrender, but how did I know if they wouldn't have killed me? And other chaps were coming along with bombs. As likely as not I should have been done in by our own lads. It was very difficult to know how to handle 'em, and up above we were being raked by rifles and machine-guns something frightful."

Many of the deep dug-outs were blown in at the entrances

so that the men were forced to come up the other side. Our men smoked them out, and dug holes for them to tease them out. It was like rat-hunting, but dangerous rats, life-size, and often desperate. They surrendered in hundreds when our men were all round them and right down in their tunnels.

I cannot tell the number of the German garrison. Nine hundred and ninety-eight unwounded men and forty wounded were brought down safely as prisoners, but others were killed on the way by their own barrage, and many fought until they died, so that some of the dug-outs are filled with dead and many lie above in the shell-craters. In one case a party of sixteen prisoners behaved treacherously.

They turned on the escort of two English soldiers taking them down, wounded them, and tried to go back to fight. They had no mercy from other English soldiers who came up at this moment. All through the night and early this morning the last remnant of the garrison held out in the north-west corner of Thiépval, until they were swept into the net by a separate and gallant assault of South-country troops.

Later in the morning the enemy attempted a counter-attack after a tremendous barrage, which I watched falling along the ridge and below in Thiépval Wood. Very lights rose through all this smoke, and I saw our men signalling for the help of our guns.

The help came quickly, and a new storm of white and black smoke-clouds rent by little flashes of flame burst beyond the village on to the German positions in and beyond the cemetery.

It was queer that this seemed to silence the enemy's guns, for after this Thiépval was quiet for a time, and our men came poking about in the open as though looking for souvenirs, and dug new holes down into the tunnels.

They seemed to be teasing out more prisoners, because I saw trails of smoke rising from those holes in the earth, and one black volume gushed out of a cavern mouth made through the heap of red rubbish which was once the château.

6

I have no space or time to deal with many events on other parts of the line, but everywhere the enemy is harassed, and

his troops do not seem able yet to rally up to strong counter-attacks. In many parts of the line patrols find it difficult to locate the enemy, and No Man's Land is widening out. His guns were active to-day along all the line, shelling Combles now and then, and Morval heavily, but even his gun-power seems to be weakening here and there, and it is likely that he is shifting some of his batteries.

One of the most remarkable Tank adventures was in the direction of Geudecourt, where our troops were held up yesterday in the usual way, that is to say, by the raking fire of machine-guns. They made two attacks, but could not get beyond that screen of bullets.

Then a Tank strolled along, rolled over the trench, with fire flashing from its flanks, and delivered it into the hands of the infantry with nearly 400 prisoners, who waved white flags above the parapet. That was not all. The Tank, exhilarated by this success, went lolloping along the way in search of new adventures. It went quite alone, and only stopped for minor repairs when it was surrounded by a horde of German soldiers. These men closed upon it, with great pluck, for it was firing in a most deadly way, and tried to kill it.

They flung bombs at it, clambered on to its back, and tried to smash it with the butt-ends of rifles, jabbed it with bayonets, fired revolvers and rifles at it, and made a wild pandemonium about it.

Then our infantry arrived, attracted by the tumult of this scene, and drove the enemy back. But the Tank had done deadly work, and between 200 and 300 killed and wounded Germans lay about its ungainly carcass. For a little while it seemed that the Tank also was out of action, but after a little attention and a good deal of grinding and grunting, it heaved itself up and waddled away.

These things sound incredible. . . . They are true. And though I write them in fantastic style because that is really the nature of the thing, it must not be forgotten that these Tanks are terrible engines of war, doing most grim work, and that the men inside are taking high risks with astonishing courage.

They are of the same breed as those flying men of ours who to-day and yesterday flew in flocks over and beyond Thiépval "ridiculously low down," as one of our officers observed,

swooping down like hawks over German batteries so that they did not dare to fire. All our soldiers are fighting with a spirit beyond the normal laws of human nature. They are fighting for a quick finish—if that may be had by courage—to this most infamous and vile war.

XXXVII

NORTHWARD FROM THIÉPVAL

1

SEPTEMBER 28

THE weather is still in our favour—and soldiers watch the weather like seamen in frail craft, knowing that two days of heavy rain, or less than that, may make a month's difference in the progress of attack, and that when mist gathers over the hills airmen cannot see to report to the guns, and guns cannot shoot on certain targets, and enemy troops may come creeping up to a counter-attack.

One of his battalions was spotted by our airmen to-day, and our artillery found the range quickly and scattered them. It puts them into the same villainous plight as our men have had to endure under the brow of the Messines and Wyghtschaete Ridges and other high ground from which the enemy could see the slighest movement of our troops and would snipe even a solitary wagon with shell-fire.

The tables are turned down here by the Somme and the Ancre. The German soldiers will know now the devilish torture of living always under hostile observation, and under great guns. They are already beginning to find it intolerable, not " sticking " it as our men " stuck " it in the salient, when we had hardly any guns to answer back.

A further gain of ground was made yesterday on the high ridge where Thiépval stood when our men captured a strong line of trenches known as the Stuff Redoubt, and again to-day when they advanced northwards from the black trees of Thiépval to the Schwaben Redoubt, which is on the edge of the plateau.

This attack at midday to-day was similar to other operations which I have described on this part of the front before. A large

number of batteries concentrated intense, violent fire upon the position beyond the last blighted trees on the ridge and on the upheaved lines of soil, of white chalk and brown earth, which marked the enemy's next defensive system.

Our heavy shells tore up the ground, opening great chasms and raising hell fires, until all the blue of the sky was hidden behind heavy spreading smoke, gushing up in round, dense masses which mingled and thickened the overhanging pall.

Then our guns lengthened their range, and our infantry trudged across through this fog and under the wild scream of shells flung beyond them, and fought their way down into the enemy's ditches. Later, after signals of distress, the German gunners barraged the line of the Schwaben Redoubt, which seemed to prove the successful advance of our men. and ranged their heavies on to Thiépval itself as we did until the day before yesterday, when it changed hands.

The industry of the men who lived there first—that 180th Regiment which has held Thiépval for two years—is now of use to our own soldiers, who can find ample and shell-proof cover in those underground rooms, one of them, at least, large enough to hold three companies of men.

I am not certain at this hour whether we hold the whole of the Schwaben Redoubt, but if not all, the rest will be taken quickly, and the whole of the high plateau will be ours from Thiépval to Ginchy old telegraph.

Meanwhile on the right we hold a firm straight line, down from Geudecourt to Combles, and it forms a solid flank.

2

September 30

It is here beyond Thiépval that the slaughter of men is greatest just now—the scene of the shambles changes quickly these days—and here that the enemy is sacrificing many more lives in the vain hope of driving our men back from the underground fortress and its surrounding redoubts.

Desperate German counter-attacks were made last night and this morning on the Schwaben Redoubt, just north of Thiépval, and on the Hessian Redoubt, farther east, where the German troops hold out in a wedge made by a sunken road from Grandcourt.

I have not often heard such a menace in the sound of gunfire as when I went to an artillery O.P. in this direction this morning. There was something in the atmosphere as well as in the intensity of the bombardment which made the shell-bursts—they were German "crumps"—thunder out in a queer, hollow, reverberating way.

The enemy had concentrated a heavy weight of metal on to our lines here (so recently his own), and I watched these high explosives vomiting up from the Thiépval Ridge, just below the Schwaben Redoubt, with a great hope that our men holding out there might have found good cover in old German dug-outs.

That is one advantage gained in capturing these strongholds. The enemy's industry through two years of trench warfare may be turned to our own good and safety. In Thiépval itself many of the elaborate underground chambers have now been found, though when our men first won the place, after all their hard hand-to-hand fighting with the garrison, they could not get to cover at once.

A major belonging to one of the battalions who came up first behind the assaulting troops—New Army men who fought like the old Regulars, though many of them were quite new to this fortress fighting—tells me that the entry into Thiépval was the most devilish experience he has had, though he has been through other frightful "shows."

A dug-out next to a hole in which he had made his temporary headquarters was blown up with sixteen men, and when he moved on beyond the château—a fine name for the only rubbish-heap which marked the site of a town—he found the head-quarters of the leading battalion "sitting on red bricks" in the midst of dead men.

By that time his colonel and adjutant had been badly wounded, and the major arrived with only three runners, surprised to see the C.O. of the other battalion standing up on the brick-heap waving his stick and rallying his men.

It is not really surprising. I met that officer to-day, and I saw the ice-cold fervour of the man, the quiet determination of his character, utterly scornful of any kind of danger. Men would follow such a man into furnace-fires—and did.

The enemy was six hours before he began to get his barrage fixed (before then he was not quite sure of his own soldiers'

whereabouts) and it was colossal when it came. Many of our men lay about wounded. It was difficult to get them into safety.

The medical officer of one of the battalions lost his stretcher-bearers and went up alone to do what he could, dodging great shells, binding up the wounds of men.

For a time a Tank gave valuable cover. It had heaved itself across a trench, enfilading it each side with deadly fire. Underneath its body there was good shelter, and the M.O. worked here for a while with a heap of wounded.

The fighting on the north-east of Thiépval is in a land of shell-craters. Most of the trenches are just linked shell-craters, into which men burrow as soon as they have rushed the ground, getting a little cover in their depths from the barrage which searches them out.

The Hessian Trench has changed hands several times within the last forty-eight hours, after savage bomb-fights and bayonet work. Forty Germans have been brought in from one bit of ground, but it is not country in which prisoners are gathered in great numbers. It is difficult to know one's own whereabouts.

There are single combats over the rim of a shell-hole. Men knock up against each other in the dark, and peer into each other's faces to know it if is friend or foe. If friend, they drop into a shell-hole together; if foe, fight till one is dead.

3

Queer things happen in shell-crater land, as when a Canadian officer brought up the rum ration for his men, and found himself in a ditch with a number of German wounded. They were lying in a row, in a tragic state.

What was the officer to do? He was puzzled, but decided to give the rum to these poor suffering devils, who were grateful for it.

In the Hessian Trench, or in a twist of the crater-land about it, two German officers and twenty-two men came down across the holes. They were met by a private soldier, who was surprised to see them. He emptied his revolver at them, shooting one of them.

Then he picked up a German rifle and fired that and killed

another. A second time he stooped and grasped a German rifle at his feet, and killed a third man. The others ran. Our man ran after them.

It was a chase along a dirty ditch which had once been a trench, and the hunter was a dead shot, with abandoned rifles, all along the way. At the end of the hunt there was only one German unwounded, and he was brought back as a prisoner.

It sounds like a lie—preposterous in the numbers given. But the German prisoner tells the same tale, and other men watched the hunt at different stages—this fearful man-hunt down a bloody ditch.

4

Things happen like that in this present fighting. Worse than that in human anguish, and better than that in courage. Out in crater-land were found three Australians in a hole.

One of them was unwounded, the other two rotting with wounds. They had been there for nine days. The unwounded man had stayed with his "pals" all that time, day after day, night after night, hoping for rescue. This part of crater-land was swept with machine-gun fire—ours or the enemy's, how could these men tell, who had lost all sense of direction?—but at night the unwounded Australian crawled out of his hole and rummaged among dead bodies for rations and water-bottles, which he took back to his friends and shared with them.

It is only one incident of the kind. In crater-land there are many like it, though not so long-drawn. But it is the enemy who suffers most out there.

Many times men left to hold a line against us do not get their reliefs, for the reliefs cannot get up through our curtain-fire or will not come.

So the others, starving and wounded, crawl back, leaving a trail of dead on the way, and for a time, here and there, the enemy has disappeared before us, so that when our patrols push out they can find no living man.

Then, after a while, the reliefs come up, dodging our shell-fire, leaving another trail of dead and wounded, and then dropping into shell-holes inhabited by corpses.

It is the way of the war, about which the orators have much

to say, not knowing quite the meaning of it. Herr Bethmann-Hollweg has not seen his men in crater-land.

5

OCTOBER 4

A little romance clings to old buildings, even the remnant of a wall or two, so that a place like Eaucourt-l'Abbaye—the ruin of a French monastery—seems of greater importance than a heap of earth and a network of ditches like the Schwaben or Hessian Redoubts. It is of no more importance (I suppose less, except as another stepping-stone on the way to Bapaume) but it is the scene of fighting which has a special interest because of those old bricks built up centuries ago by French monks to enclose a place of prayer and peaceful work.

On Monday last, when the fighting began, two monsters came crawling up to the ditches which had been dug by the fighting men outside the monastery walls. They breathed out smoke and fire. Their sides opened with stabs of flame, and they killed the men in the ditches by rolling on them and crushing them, and hurling invisible bolts at them.

The ghosts of the monks, if any were there, would have seen that modern warfare has brought back the mediæval dragon-myth, and made it real, and more terrible than superstition. They were the Tanks which came.

One could write all this fantastically and make a queer tale of it. The truth is fantastic, but one must write it soberly, because they were British boys who have given their lives or a little of their blood to get these bits of wall called Eaucourt-l'Abbaye, with its vaults and cellars. To them it was not like an old fairy-tale, but was just one of those grim bits of fighting, damnably dangerous and ugly and cheerless, which belong to the battles of the Somme.

The first part I have already told, two days ago, how our men, in their attack on the double line of trenches outside the monastery, were checked by barbed wire and machine-guns, and two Tanks came to the rescue. One of them, after doing useful work, came to a stop, and the skipper came out and, after doing most gallant service, was wounded.

Three of the crew put him into a shell-crater and would not leave him. A day later he was wounded again by a bomb, which

—amazing as it seems—did not burst, but injured him badly in the ribs, so that he had to endure great suffering out there in the crater.

Our infantry passed over the trenches and through the monastery ruins and dug a new ditch on the north side for defence and cover. Heavy rain came and drenched them and swamped the ditch. They were cold and wet and hungry.

For a time it was impossible to get food up to them. The ground behind was a quagmire for miles. The carriers became bogged. That little body of men to the north of the abbey were dangerously isolated, and might have starved but for the help of troops on their right, who discovered their needs and sent food.

That was on Monday night. To the best of their belief the enemy was in force all round them. They could see flares going up at Warlencourt, and from a primeval burial-ground, about forty feet high, called the Butte de Warlencourt, just north of them, and they could hear the snap of rifle-bullets from close shell-craters and the rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun from a mill-house 300 yards away, north-west.

From what our men learnt yesterday there was an hour or two at least when they had only a few Germans in the close neighbourhood of the abbey.

The enemy's troops were expecting their relief. When they found that the reliefs did not come up they cursed the war and the weather—they were as wet and hungry as our men—and decided to go back without further waiting. Only a few snipers and machine-gunners stayed.

Such things have happened before in the enemy's lines as I have already described. It was given away this time by a body of twenty men with an officer and non-commissioned officer, who came down past the mill-house and took cover under a bank close to the abbey buildings.

They were seen by our men, who crept out towards them with a machine-gun, and then shouted "Hands up!" Twenty men held up their hands. The officer and the "unter-offizier" did not surrender, but ran hard back and made their escape, unless two of our bullets reached them.

The twenty men told their tale. They belonged to the battalion which had been sent up to relieve the troops holding the outskirts of the abbey. They had found no one to receive

them or to explain the lie of the land. They had not the slightest notion of the amount of ground held by the English here.

Other bodies of the relieving troops were just as ignorant. Some of them blundered against trenches held by our men on the right of the abbey, and were dealt with by them.

Meanwhile a telephone message had been sent to our artillery, which flung out a barrage and caught more of the relief coming down from Warlencourt.

In spite of their horrible mess, the men who got through the barrage were bold fellows and attacked the abbey and the trenches south of it. They had a new supply of bombs and used them freely. Our men were sadly at a disadvantage. Bombs were very scarce.

A dump had exploded by accident, sending their store to blazes. They had to fight with what they carried on their bodies, and it was not enough. For a time they had to submit to the fortune of war, and while still holding the north side of the abbey and ground to the east and south-east, could not keep the enemy from bombing his way into a part of the ruins and into the southern ditch which had been captured with the help of the Tanks.

So the situation remained last evening and night. New and heavy rain-storms increased the ugly discomforts of our men.

They were clinging on to water-logged holes. They were wet to the skin, covered in slimy mud, and cold and weary. The wounded among them were in a tragic plight.

The dead seemed to have all the luck. . . . But the fighting spirit did not desert them. New bombs arrived, and that heartened them. Some of their comrades came fighting up from the south.

Early in the morning there were roars of explosion as the bombs crashed into the south ditch and then burst among the abbey ruins. It was then that there was hot fighting underground as well as above-ground. Our men "cleaned up" Eaucourt-l'Abbaye.

It is a technical phrase which has a very grim meaning. There are no Germans there now in the abbey vaults, except the bodies of their dead.

In those great arched cellars, where old spiders have spun

their webs, and where old monks once came blinking down with horn lanterns to fetch the abbot's wine, or to count their stores, English soldiers, covered with mud, but drier now, sit rubbing up their rifles and binding up their wounded and talking of the fight that is over.

XXXVIII

THE WAY TO BAPAUME

1

OCTOBER 7

OUR troops have taken advantage of fine weather after heavy rains to make a new attack this afternoon upon a German front of 12,000 yards, and have captured a number of important positions, including the fortified village of Le Sars, to the north-west of Eaucourt-l'Abbaye. For several days past the pressure of our attack had to be slackened on account of the bad state of the ground and the rain-storms, which prevented artillery and aerial observation.

It was bad luck upon our men, as it increased the difficulties for getting up the supplies essential to the success of a new move forward, and made the battlefields one vast bog, in which guns and men and wagons and mules were clogged with slime and mud.

Yesterday the sky cleared, and the men who had taken Eaucourt-l'Abbaye by such a gallant struggle pushed out and seized the mill-house to the west of those ruins from which the enemy had been maintaining heavy machine-gun fire.

It is to those who know what mud and rain mean to an army in the field an astonishing and audacious thing to attack in such numbers to-day, abruptly and without waiting for more favourable conditions of ground.

At this hour, when heavy fighting continues along the whole line from Le Sars eastwards towards Le Transloy, it is impossible to write more than a few details of the progress that has been made already.

The taking of Le Sars itself is the gain of another fortress defending the way to Bapaume, the main road to that town running through the village, which was in a natural position

of defence protected by a deep cutting on the right, by a double line of trenches to the south, and by machine-gun emplacements with a wide field of fire.

It was from that position that our troops were heavily enfiladed in their first assaults upon the abbey ruins, and the enemy had determined to defend it desperately, as it holds a position of great strategic importance to our future drive against them.

Well, they have lost it. Before the red dusk this evening our airmen, who were hovering over the place high above the shell-fire, signalled back that our infantry were well into the town and sending back batches of prisoners.

It was a rapid assault. Within an hour our men had fought their way across the tangle of trenches and shell-craters just below the village, and had gained their chief objectives, which included the deep cutting striking into the village from the right.

The only way of escape for the Germans was westwards through a belt of scarred and blackened tree-stumps. I do not know yet whether they had been dislodged from that primeval burial-place called the Butte de Warlencourt, which rises about fifty feet to the north of Le Sars on the right of the Bapaume Road.

The ground beyond has the village of La Barque on the right of the road and four sunken cross-roads called the Cut-Throat on the west of a deep ravine, just above the village of Warlencourt-Eaucourt. It is here that the enemy will be under our barrage and the enemy's troops must rally there if they can for any counter-attack.

East of Le Sars and north of Flers and Lesbœufs British battalions have made solid progress, driving back the enemy out of trenches hurriedly scraped up during recent weeks, but not so richly provided with dug-outs as his earlier lines, so that when our guns concentrated their fire on them the only escape from great slaughter was to hold them thinly with the main reliance on machine-guns for defence.

Our right wing has advanced about a kilometre from Lesbœufs towards Le Transloy, where it has linked up with the French battalions pressing forward to Sailly-Saillisel, with their usual dashing spirit of attack.

It seems that the day has been in our favour all along the

line of this sweeping movement. We shall know more and may tell more in a few hours.

2

OCTOBER 8

The men who took Le Sars are still holding it, and only the short facts of their case come back from them through the mist and across the water-pools. Last night and this morning it has been raining again, in a drizzling way, and all the shell-craters are ponds.

It would be possible to swim in some of them, those scooped out by the biggest shells and linked up with others. It is not easy to get runners back across country like that, and the Germans find it harder and are drowned in many of those pits, because of our artillery-fire pouring "stuff" over them.

Yet, curiously, it is from the Germans that one learns most of the frightful drama which went on yesterday afternoon in Le Sars village. They are prisoners, 300 of them, with five officers who were sent back to safety, while our men stayed on and fought on.

Those from the village—it's just the name that stands—belong to the 321st and 322nd "Ersatz," or Reserve Regiment. They had been reinforced, strengthening the garrison and expecting an attack, by some uncanny means, at the exact minute.

They were stout fellows—our officers pay them this tribute—and they had been ordered to fight to the last men rather than surrender this fortress, which is one of the gates barring the long road to Bapaume.

They trained their machine-guns and trench-mortars on our front trenches, kept their rifles dry by wrapping them in rags, and sent out volunteers and victims to lie in the shell-pits waist-high in water to snipe our men as they came over.

They knew that they had a poor chance really to keep Le Sars, and their best hope of life or death was to put up a hard fight. Our guns had already smashed the houses and barns to rubbish-heaps like those of Martinpuich and Courcelette—even a little more, judging from what our airmen saw—and our nine-point-twos, eight-inch, and other monster guns were making a worse hell of the place.

The men of the German 321st and 322nd Regiment of Reserves lay low in their dug-outs and tucked their heads down in new trenches, finely built in a hurry.

What happened first was that our barrage lifted and long waves of brown soldiers sprang over their parapets facing up from ground close south of Le Sars and on the German left from the edge of Eaucourt-l'Abbaye and the mill-house beyond.

Their first goal on our right was one of those beastly quadrilateral redoubts called the Tangle (there is another behind our new line at Eaucourt), and after that the road from Martinpuich, north-eastwards, and then forward to the Butte de Warlencourt—that old high tumulus in which the bones of some prehistoric man lay until we flung them up to the surface of our modern civilization.

3

The Tangle was the first check and a bad one. Machine-guns swept the field with bullets so that men lay on their faces in the mud, not bothering, you may guess, about appearances. They were just scarecrows and mud-larks, wallowing in slime but finding an inch or two of luck in it. Another muddy thing came on the way to the Tangle, more like a primeval river-hog than in the early days of its debut, because of the mountains of slush churned up by its flanks.

The Tank turned its snout towards the Tangle and struggled over the choppy ground—wave upon wave of craters with high rims, until it reached a bit of the deep cutting which makes a hole in the side of Le Sars.

This sunken road, or old quarry track, was filled with German soldiers alive and dead. The living ones flung bombs at the Tank, fired rifle-volleys and tried to stab it from beneath as it straddled across the ditch and stayed across it, firing venomously from each flank. After that, something having happened to its internal organs, it committed "hari-kari." But it seems to have been useful before going up in a blaze of glory.

The German prisoners who faced our men in the outskirts of Le Sars and then farther back in the sunken road, and in the hiding-places below-ground, say there was grim and bitter

fighting there, and pay a soldier's tribute to the men who captured them. "They fought us fiercely, and beat us. We could not stand up against them." Our men saw red, even in the mist, and in the hand-to-hand fighting they had the Germans by the throat.

XXXIX

THE GERMAN VERDICT OF THE SOMME BATTLES

1

OCTOBER 3

THERE has come into our hands, by the fortune of war, a long and critical report by General Sixt von Armin, commanding the fourth German Corps against the British front in the battles of the Somme during July.

It is an important historical document. The German General has written it as a great soldier writes on his own subject, without passion or prejudice, in a cold scientific spirit, analysing the qualities of his enemy as well as the enemy's weaknesses, and exposing the errors and failures of his own organization, leadership, and troops with the same impartial candour.

It is well done, minutely technical, full of military knowledge and common sense. But in setting all these things down, in this analysis of German organization, tactics, material, and "moral," during the first month of our great offensive, General von Armin has confessed to the utter failure of his war-machine.

In almost every paragraph, dealing with every department of his corps in fighting organization, there is this confession of breakdown and an acknowledgment of British superiority.

No General of ours writing of our own troops, or of our own artillery, or air service, could claim greater supremacy than is granted to us by this German army corps commander in his comparison between our power and his own. To our soldiers this document is worth a thousand times its weight in gold as a moral tonic, for everything they hoped had been attained in these battles of the Somme—the ever-increasing strain upon German organization, the effect of our artillery-fire, the mastery of our flying corps, the demoralization of the enemy's command

is here admitted as the bitter fruit of experience. It is the fruit of one month's experience.

Since then there have been more months, and not all the lessons set down in this document have been of help to the enemy, but the cup of bitterness has been filled and refilled.

2

The report begins with a tribute to our British infantry, which, says General von Armin, " has undoubtedly learnt much since the autumn offensive " (of 1915).

" It shows great dash in attack, a factor to which immense confidence in its overwhelming artillery greatly contributes. The Englishman also has his physique and training in his favour.

" The English infantry showed great tenacity in defence. This was especially noticeable in the case of small parties, which when once established with machine-guns in the corner of a wood or group of houses were very difficult to drive out."

Again and again General von Armin reveals the new and overwhelming power of our artillery.

" Particularly noticeable was the high percentage of medium and heavy guns with the artillery, which, apart from this, was numerically far superior to ours. The ammunition has apparently improved considerably.

" All our tactically important positions were methodically bombarded by the English artillery, as well as all known infantry and battery positions.

" Extremely heavy fire was continuously directed on the villages situated immediately behind the firing-line as well as on all natural cover afforded by the ground. Registration and fire control were assisted by well-organized aerial observation. At night the villages also were frequently bombed by aeroplanes."

The terrifying destructive power of our artillery is revealed not only by these definite statements, but in advice under separate headings. Thus, in the instructions to officers selecting infantry positions :

" Narrow trenches with steep sides again proved very disadvantageous, and caused considerably more casualties (men being buried) then shallower trenches with a wide top.

. . . A cover-trench roughly parallel with the front fire-trench is not sound. Such trenches are destroyed by the enemy's fire at the same time and in exactly the same way as the actual fire-trenches."

Heavy casualties were also experienced during July by the German artillery, as the following note shows:

"The English custom of shelling villages heavily led to the adoption of the principle that batteries should never be sited in the villages themselves. . . . The employment of steep slopes for battery positions must also be discarded for similar reasons."

A melancholy picture is drawn of the German battle headquarters, also brought under fire by our far-reaching artillery, and in such a zone of fire that German Staff officers get killed on their way up or cannot find their whereabouts, or having found the building scuttle down into overcrowded hiding-places, panic-stricken by our bombardments. Owing to choosing unsuitable sites for battle headquarters there were "frequent interruptions in personal and telephone traffic by artillery-fire, and overcrowding in the few available cellars in the villages."

That rush for cellars already thronged must hurt the pride and dignity of the German Staff. They are recommended to have many sign-boards put up to direct them to battle headquarters, and to avoid "lengthy searches which caused many casualties."

3

The enemy's own artillery was much hampered during the July battles by the steady intensity of our fire.

"It was found very difficult," says General von Armin, "to form a continuous barrage, without gaps, in front of our own lines, owing to the occasional uncertainty as to the position of our front line, which was continually changing during the fighting, the frequent changing of batteries, the regrouping of the artillery, which was often necessary, the bad conditions for observation, the permanent interruption of the telephone communications, and the practically continuous heavy fire which was maintained behind our front line."

The General describes in detail the enormous difficulties experienced by his officers in bringing up reserves quickly

for counter-attacks, owing to the severity of our barrage, the breakdown of telephonic communications, the killing of the runners, and the time taken for transmission of orders from the front line.

The troops have to "advance slowly across country, with which they are generally unacquainted, and under heavy fire."

He confesses to the utter failure of the counter-attacks made against us during July, without method and without weight. His words are:

"If counter-attacks, which, on account of the situation, ought to be methodically prepared, are hurried, they cost much blood, and cause the troops to lose their trust in their leaders if they fail, which nearly always happens in such a case.

4

With regard to the air service, General von Armin acknowledges in strong language the supremacy of the British and the failure of their own:

"The means for providing the artillery with aerial observation has proved to be insufficient. . . . The numerical superiority of the enemy's airmen and the fact that their machines were better were made disagreeably apparent to us, particularly in their direction of the enemy's artillery-fire and in bomb-dropping."

"The number of our battle-planes was also too small. The enemy's airmen were often able to fire successfully on our troops with machine-guns by descending to a height of a few hundred metres.

"The German anti-aircraft gun sections could not continue firing at this height without exposing their own troops to serious danger from fragments of shell. . . .

"A further lesson to be learnt from this suprisingly bold procedure on the part of the English airmen is that the infantry make too little use of their rifles as a means of driving off aircraft."

5

The army corps commander responsible for the organization and direction of the troops who fought against us in July finds

failure and shortage in almost every department of war material at his disposal.

The supply of artillery ammunition of all kinds during the first days of the battle did not equal the expenditure. Reserve supplies were only available in very small quantities.

There were "repeated requests from all arms for an increased supply of entrenching tools."

"The original supply of maps was insufficient, not only as regards quantity, but also as regards detail."

The supply of horses and vehicles to the troops "has reached the utmost limits, owing, on the one hand, to the permanent reduction in the establishment of horses, and, on the other hand, to the permanent increase in fighting material and articles of equipment."

"The existing telephone system proved totally inadequate in consequence of the development which the fighting took."

"The existing organization in the light signalling service does not meet requirements."

The supply of light pistols for signalling "is too small."

The establishment of motor-cycles proved insufficient for the heavy fighting. This deficiency was "painfully evident."

"The great weight" of the German machine-guns "has again proved to be a serious disadvantage under these conditions."

"Complaints have been received that the ammunition-boxes and water-jackets of the machine-guns are too heavy."

"It is universally suggested that the supply of hand-grenades should be increased."

With regard to food there is no suggestion that the army behind the lines is on short rations, but there are difficulties in getting supplies up to the front trenches, and it is recommended that men going into action should carry their "third iron rations"—that is, a more ample supply of tinned foods.

They ask for more tinned meats, tinned sausages, bread, and mineral waters, but the General advises that tinned herrings should not be eaten, as they encourage thirst.

In all but the food department the German organization of supplies is weighed in the balance and found wanting by one of their own great Generals.

In spite of all their boasted genius of organization, and it has

been wonderful (let us admit that handsomely), it could not withstand the tremendous pressure of our July thrust.

It failed item by item—artillery, aviation, ammunition, and stores of every kind. The Staffs were inadequate, the communications broke down, the great German war-machine was strained and put out of gear and badly knocked about by the ferocity and continuance of the British assault.

Since then it has not been able to recover its efficiency. The pressure has become more powerful, the strain harder to bear.

If General von Armin were to write a second report on the battles of the Somme it would be a more gloomy document than this. But what he has written stands, and it is a frightful confession which would put terror into the hearts of the German people could they read it.

They will not be allowed to read it, for it tells the truth, which the war lords are hiding from them.

[It will be seen that my dispatches do not include the capture of Beaumont-Hamel—one of the most astounding achievements in all this fighting. In October I was compelled to go home on sick-leave, so that I missed that great battle on the Ancre. It has revived the nation's hope that by a continuous series of these blows the German resistance will break down utterly at last and that they will acknowledge defeat. From a military point of view that hope is the best thing we have, but the fulfilment of it must be deferred through many months of another year, reeking, like this one, of blood and massacre and sacrifice.]

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